

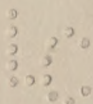






LYDIA OF LEBANON

By
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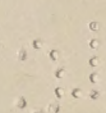


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TO MY SONS
AND
IN MEMORY OF THEIR FATHER

LYDIA OF LEBANON

CHAPTER I.

It was back in the seventies, in eighteen hundred, on a sunny autumn afternoon, that the daily stage from Alderson to Alden Center — a distance of about ten miles — slowly wound its way in a lazy manner up the steep mountain-road, the lead horse nosing its way in a zigzag fashion from one side of the road to the other, as is customary with mountain-road horses, and stopping at all level places to rest a bit and, if possible, snatch a nip from the low birch bushes or sweet-fern shrub that lined either side of the stony road.

An early frost had touched the sumac and soft maple leaves, bringing out their wondrous hidden beauty of crimson and gold, with soft brown shades that harmonized perfectly. An occasional flash of blue like bits of fallen sky showed from the old stump fences or field stone walls, as the bluebirds were arranging for their final leave-taking to a warmer climate. Now and then, the chatter of chipmonk or ground-squirrel was heard as they raced in unbounded freedom from rock to stump or scampered up the lofty trees. The sun was slowly sinking on the other side of Old Baldy, a western knob of the Green Mountains, and an occasional whiff of crisp, cool air swept up from the valley beyond.

The Overland, for such was the name of the heavy platform spring-wagon more familiarly called "the stage," had a dusty drab-colored body, plentifully striped with deep vermilion, a top of heavy drab canvas, and side-curtains of same material, these to be rolled up tight in pleasant weather and buttoned down snug to keep out winter storms, or the heavy summer thunder-showers that came up so suddenly at times. Its capacity was three seats inside and a high driver's seat in front. On the back of the Overland's body was a wooden rack to hold heavy luggage, express, or freight, and to the dashboard, beside the whip-socket, was lashed a leathern pouch that held a great brass horn. One long, shrill toot of this horn warned the dwellers along the line that a letter, paper, or parcel was forthcoming for some member of the family, before whose house the Overland stopped, and two long blasts was a welcome warning to the distant mountain-folk for the same purpose.

It was getting late in the season, and passengers from the world beyond the mountains were rare. On this particular autumn afternoon, the stage was empty, but, perched on the high seat beside the driver, sat a stranger—a small, middle-aged woman. She was dressed in the plain, gray garb of the Quaker, a little close bonnet of shirred gray silk, with shawl and gloves of the same color, which matched exactly the soft, wool merino dress she wore. A snowy kerchief of finest lawn, neatly crossed on her bosom, completed the costume of Si Newman's passenger.

Si wore a faded black coat, blue flannel shirt turned in well at his sun-tanned throat, and a pair

of homespun trousers, tucked into his cowhide boots. Though late in the season, he still clung to a dingy straw hat, from under the brim of which a pair of kindly, soft-gray eyes took in every move of the stranger beside him.

The little woman had been strangely silent during the entire journey, speaking only in answer to the driver's questions. They were slowly nearing their destination, and were within a couple miles of Alden Center, the end of the stage-route. They were now traveling on the level. On one side, green meadows and great brown fields stretched off toward the mountains; on the other, the ground sloped gradually down to the valley below. Groves of fir and spruce intervened and the passing breezes were fond of shaking out that delightful resinous, woodsy odor that time and again was wafted up to the driver and his companion.

Down in the valley, a stream from Alden wound its snakelike way through patches of silver birch and whispering willows. Away on the far side was an immense maple grove. Close to its edge and near the stream was plainly visible a long, low weather-beaten shanty with its field-stone chimneys on either end, stretching up to the clouds. This was a sugar-camp and, every spring, the woods swarmed with men, many of whom were Canucks from across the Canadian line. Some tapped the trees, some gathered sap, others hauled wood and kept up good fires for the boiling of the sap and condensing it into syrup, or "sugaring off."

Still farther down, there stood out in magnificent outline or relief the famous Parker apple-orchards, the largest and finest in the state.

"Can thee tell me about that great plantation of trees yonder?" asked the woman.

Si Newman shifted the quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other, gave a sly squirt of tobacco juice behind his hand, drew in the leg that had been swinging outside the wagon, and, pulling a little tighter rein on the horses, replied: "Wall, I jest reckon I kin inform yer on thet subject, ma'am. I hain't been travelin' these 'ere mountains an' hills fer forty odd year fer nothin'. Yes, ma'am, I kin tell yer all erbout it. Ye see, it wuz like this: it wuz 'way back in ther forties when old man Parker come up 'ere frum Massachusetts; he come 'ere fur his health. Arter erwhile, he closed a bargain fer thet hull mountain-side, bought it fer a song nigh erbout. It wuz covered with ther finest uv timber. Wall, he hired er crew of Canucks who cut an' felled ernuf ter build er cabin fer him an' his new wife, an' they settled right down ter livin'.

"Wall, Stuart Parker cleared thet hull mountain-side; patch arter patch uv timber come down; an' all the time he wuz growin' stronger. One day, ther wuz er leetle baby come ter him an' his good wife, Susan, an' ermong ther presents sent up from Boston wuz a basket uv apples, an' Stuart Parker saved every darn seed. Wall, he planted 'um out ther next spring. A good many uv 'um sprouted an' growed. Old Parker — but he wuz young then — planted 'um over. Then he planned out thet orchard an' ev'ry time ther wuz er new baby come, he planted out er tree an' every time er visitor come, he planted er tree. He'd set er Spy fer er boy an' er Jilly Flower fer er gal. Wall, it went on thet way until ev'ry child an' visitor wuz

avored with er tree planted fur 'um until ther wuz ther finest an' biggest orchard in ther hull uv Vermont. Gosh all fish-hooks, ma'am, no, they wuzn't all frum them ther seed. Wall, thet air orchard is now called ther great 'Parker Memorial Orchard' thet yer read erbout. Them air apples has took ther blue ribbon more then once an' don't yer fergit it."

The beautiful stream below ran through a rich farming-district. Occasional farmhouses could be seen snuggled in green hollows or perched on the breezy hilltops. On beyond, the distant village could be seen with its rustic one street that ran parallel with the stream. Its buildings were strung along like an old-fashioned button-string. First among the buildings of importance were the churches. Alden Center boasted of two, one the old South Baptist meeting-house with its tall, slim spire reaching heavenward. Along its east side, ran a row of sheds to accommodate the teams, and there Sunday morning, could be found almost any kind of a vehicle from a farm-wagon to a family-chaise. It was surrounded by its "God's Acre," or graveyard as it was commonly called. On the north side, was the Presbyterian Church, with almost identical surroundings. Then, came the Academy, which yearly turned out a goodly number of graduates to be scattered in various directions; some went to college, some were apprenticed to tradesmen in Alderson or Bolton, some back to the old farm-life, and some drifted out to the larger cities.

Lem Sawyer owned the village general store, and here everything was kept from a nutmeg to a hay-rake, and Lemuel had also the honor of being post-

master. Here, daily, was the usual exchange of neighborhood gossip that was greatly enjoyed, especially when Si Newman, the stage-driver, would bring in an interesting batch from along the line.

The farmers, whose horses stood hitched in a row to a pole held in place by two upright posts that stood in front of the general store, swapped politics, gossip, or religion, as the notion took them. Next to this store, stood the village tavern. Its narrow white sign-board on which was painted in big, black letters, "Alden Tavern," swayed and creaked on its rusty hinges, with every passing breeze. The low, broad veranda, with benches running the whole length, invited the bystanders to a place of rest, and here daily loafed all that could spare the time to watch the stage come in. A few dull-gray houses of various sizes and kinds, many with neat front yards and white-washed palings, farther down a blacksmith-shop with one end partitioned off for a cobbler's shop, the cobbler acting as barber when the occasion demanded — completed the business part.

Not far down the road, and well set back, was a fine native-stone house with brick trimmings, deep, mullioned windows with broad stone sills, broad verandas, well-kept lawn with neatly trimmed hedges, and wide brick walks. It was called the Grange, and was both the envy and the admiration of the surrounding country.

At sight of the distant village, the stranger again inquired of the driver about its inhabitants and asked who lived in the great house, the chimneys of which were visible among the distant tree tops, remarking that it was an unusual sight in such a

remote place. Si Newman again shifted his quid, gave the customary squirt and replied:

"Wall, ma'am, I guess I kin satisfy yer curiosity. I jest happen ter know ther inhabitants uv thet place. Thet is ther home uv old Squire Granger, who hez ez fine er gal ez ye'd find in er day's travel. No, ma'am she's not his darter. He calls her his ward an' is mighty fond uv her. Her name is St. Clair, Miss Lillian St. Clair."

The stranger gave a slight start and again inquired who lived in the farmhouse they were approaching. It was a medium-sized frame house, set well back from the road, neat in appearance, and surrounded by both fruit and forest trees, which made it very attractive to the eye.

"Wall, ma'am, Uncle Nat Wilbur an' his wife, Aunt Rhue, lives thar, an' er likely couple they air, too."

"Wilt thou kindly stop at the little bridge we are coming to and help me off, and, to-morrow, stop thy horses at yonder farmhouse gate, for I desire to return to Alderson with thee."

"Yes, ma'am, I'll do it an' mighty glad uv yer company, fer it's er little tejus travelin' over these hills erlone. I guess ther 'Samist understood his bizness when he talked erbout ther hills so much. By ther way, do yer happen ter know Uncle Nat's folks, ma'am," and he slyly spit over the wheel as he clucked to his horses.

"Thee should not be so inquisitive, my friend, but I will answer thee, nay, and ask thee if thee knows Friend Wilbur thyself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Wall, thet's er purty question ter ask me — do I know Uncle Nat Wilbur? Wall, I

guess yes, an' thet's not all: I know Aunt Rhue ez my own mother an' leetle Lyddy, too. Yes, ma'am, I do know them all an' mighty proud uv ther knowin', fer they air er prime lot."

As Si drew near the little bridge, he stopped and slid down from the off side; then, he gently helped the little lady to the ground.

"Say, ma'am, shall I tell Aunt Rhue ye air comin'? Yer see, I hev ter stop thar an' leave some kind uv er tarnal riggin' uv er chair an' it beats all creation whar it come frum, but I'm sure glad fur it, fer, since Uncle Nat hed his legs broke an' his leetle granddaughter hed ther fever, it's bin er purty uphill job with only Aunt Rhue ter manage."

"No; keep silent, please, that I came with thee. I will rest a while and then walk on and announce myself."

"All right, jest ez yer say, not ez I keer," and, putting one foot on the hub of the wheel, he swung himself up to his seat and, with a cluck to his horses, said to himself: "Gosh all fish-hooks, I wonder who in thunder thet ther woman is an' what she wants at Nat Wilbur's!"

The little woman in gray sat down on a stone and, dropping her tired head in her hands, said: "I am so tired. Why, oh, why did I come? But the hand of Providence has guided me and I will abide by the consequences."

The stage rattled along the dusty road and drew up before the farmhouse. Then Si gave his horn a shrill toot, turned and looked back toward the bridge, and waited.

"O, Grandma, come quick! Uncle Si has stopped

and has blowed his horn before our own gate. Do come quick, Grandma."

"La, Lyddy, compose yerself. I'll jest slip on this fresh gingham. Hand me my sunbonnet, child, while I smooth my hair. Ye fluster me when yer hurry me so," and Aunt Rhue brought her hands down each side of her face with a smoothing motion while she spoke.

"O, Grandma, hurry, please. Why, Uncle Si is taking down some queer-looking thing. He surely has made a mistake, for it can never be for us."

"Now, Lyddy, don't get excited. Yer Uncle Si knows his bizness an' we will soon know all erbout it," and, putting on her sunbonnet, she went out the kitchen-door.

"Hello, Aunt Rhue," called the stage-driver. "I 'low yer must hev friends somewhar, fer here's er pair uv ther finest lambs I ever sot eyes on, reg'lar Southdowns."

"Goodness gracious, Si, do yer mean ter say them lambs air fer me?"

"Yes, siree, they air your'n, Aunt Rhue; yer name's writ right on ter ther rack ez plain ez day — 'Mrs. Rhuia Wilbur, Leb'non, near Alden Center, care Mr. Si Newman, via The Overland.' Now, Aunt Rhue, what in thunder's 'via'? An' here's er letter fer Lyddy. How's ther leetle gal gittin' on an' how's Uncle Nat?"

"Lyddy's gettin' on fair ter middlin', Si, but I feel downright sorry fer Father. He's nigh erbout heart-broken. It's gittin' late an' ther's so much to do on ther farm this fall. It's mighty tejus, Si, ter lie like Father does, day in an' day out. But, Si,

what's this thing?" laying her hand on the chair "Surely, this is not fer us. Why, this thing's frum Bolton."

"Yes, it is, Aunt Rhue, an' erbout ther tarnalist, confoundest thing ter handle yer ever saw. Why, it's erbout ez onery ez thet stringed harp instrument, ther kind yer hev ter sit down ter play on, ther kind I brung up fer Miss St. Clair last summer. Tell Uncle Nat I'll be up arter supper an' chore-time ter shave him an' ter look into this 'ere pesky consarn an' help get him inter this new-fangled riggin'. It says on it 'Improved Invalid Chair.' Wall, all I hope is, it'll improve ther invalid." Then, he placed his foot on the hub and swung into place, cracked his whip, and the Overland bounded along the dusty road, out of sight.

Aunt Rhue stood dumbfounded, arms akimbo, looking at first one, then the other.

"Whar under ther light uv ther sun, moon, an' stars did these things come frum? They sure must be fer us, fer ther name is writ ez plain ez day on 'um. But whar did they come frum?"

She walked quickly to the house, waving the letter, and, as she entered the door, she said: "Here, Lyddy, is a real letter fer yer, an' yer name is writ in full on it, an' thar's a pair uv ther purtiest lambs out thar yer ever sot eyes on, beside er new-fangled chair uv some kind fer yer grandpa. I must call Jake at once ter help me git ther lambs eround ter ther barn before it gits any later, an' he must bring thet air chair in, too."

Lydia took the letter, looked at the address thoughtfully, turned it over again and again. "Perhaps I had better wait until Grandma comes in,"

she said to herself, and laid the letter on the table. Lydia was between nine and ten years old. She had great, brown lustrous eyes and a crop of dark chestnut-brown hair that in the sunlight glinted a burnished-copper hue. Although it was combed straight back from a broad, fair forehead and braided tight into a pigtail that was tied with a narrow black ribbon, tiny, kinky tendrils sprung up over her head. She was hollow-eyed and her high cheek bones were painfully visible. She was slender, tall for her age, and very thin. Her linsy-woolsy dress came just below her knees and her long, brown ankles were bare. She had recently recovered from a long spell of fever, and her convalescence was slow. She had been deprived of the tender, crooning mother love, and her loving, restless, unquiet little heart had never really been understood. She had a yearning love for everything beautiful far beyond her years and fully enjoyed her mountain-home surrounded by nature's lavish hand. But there was ever an indescribable longing for something she could not understand nor explain; consequently she never mentioned it but to her grandmother.

Her child-life had been somewhat dreary — many a drab day with no brightness or change except what her fancy embroidered. There was no source on this remote mountain-home from which to draw childhood's happiness, but she built her castles and lived in them. Her grandparents idolized her in their quiet way and were kind and good to her, for the only real heart-love she knew was from them. Her dream-house, as she called it, gave her much innocent satisfaction. By its imaginary fires, she warmed into life many companions. She often tried

to imagine her parents had gone away for a time and that some time they would surely return for her, and often fell asleep, dreaming she was cuddled up in her mother's arms.

All through her childhood, she lived in that imaginary frame of mind. Her dream-home in the summer was under a large clump of sweet elder. Here, she would cuddle down, folding her bare feet beneath her, then with elbows on her knees, and chin resting in the palms of her hands, give herself up to her dreams or reveries. At times, she actually hungered for the mother love, yet, despite her double orphanage, she was very happy on Lebanon.

Child though she was, she had wonderful dreams of glorious achievements. Some day, she would go out into the great world beyond. O, happy child! "Close your alabaster box of ambition and lock it in the sanctuary of content!" Just be happy while you can. Her love and tender care for her grandparents was pathetically touching. There was ever a depth of gentleness and tenderness shown them far beyond her years, and her grandparents would quickly resent the least intimation that they did not love her; yet it was impossible for them to understand the delicate, sensitive little soul with whom they had to deal. They idolized her in their way, and the homely, wholesome discipline she daily received was unconsciously paving the way for a useful and delightful future.

She picked up the letter and looked at it longingly. She could resist the temptation no longer to open and read it. Carefully, she broke the seal and drew forth the letter, scanning it over quickly.

Then, she darted into the next room where her grandfather was lying.

"O, Grandpa! here is a really, truly letter for me, and who do you suppose it is from? It is from that lovely Mr. Armstrong who boarded here this summer. Don't you remember? He left just after you broke your legs. Just listen, Grandpa, he writes that he has ordered a chair for you that he thinks will make you more comfortable, and some lambs for me. The very thing I have wanted so long. O, I am so happy. Do you think Grandma will be disappointed because they are not for her?"

"Tut, tut, my child, now don't go ter worryin' erbout thet. Yer grandma'll be glad ther fer yer."

"Grandpa, why do you suppose that fine gentleman sent those lovely things to us? He says when he comes this way again, he will surely stop, for he enjoyed Lebanon so much with us."

"I don't know, Lyddy; p'raps he hed been readin' ther passage uv Scriptor thet says: 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto ther least uv them, ye do it unto me.'"

"Grandpa, can you spare me for a few minutes, just long enough to run out to the barn and see the lambs?"

"Yes, yes, child, run erlong; er breath uv fresh air'll do yer good."

As the happy child darted out of the door, Uncle Nat took a long sigh and said: "Wall, wall, uv all things! Who would hev thought thet young Armstrong would hev remembered us way off 'ere on Lebanon? He wuz always so tarnal busy nosin' eround arter rocks an' stuns an' readin' an' writin', yer'd never think he hed time ter think uv anybody's trouble an' affliction. But he wuz er clever

sort uv er chap, arter all, an' seemed ter set great store by Lyddy. I'm certainly thankful fer anything that'll help git me out uv 'ere; an' ez fer Lyddy, pore little gal, it'll help her ter pass ther time pleasant-like, lookin' arter ther lambs."

He slowly raised his thin, bony hand, running his fingers through his grizzled grey hair and beard; then he said: "Oh, Lord, how much longer hev I got ter lie here? There's ther corn sufferin' ter be cut an' shocked, ther late pertaters ter dig, thet lean-to ter fix fer winter shelter fer ther sheep an' cattle, ter say nothin' erbout them tarnal bees. They must be looked arter fer all thet honey an' beeswax'll be clear gain ef we kin only git it looked arter an' off ter market. Mother can't ever go ter makin' thet air journey erlone, an' we can't spare Jake, an' Philip an' Lyddy air too young. I jest tell ye, Lord, we are up ag'inst er hard problem jest at present, with no solution ter fit it either. If we pay ther intrust comin' due January, it'll leave mighty little ter 'ply on ther mortgage, an' me lyin' here jest good fer nothin'. But I must not complain. Mother's got all she kin 'tend ter without listenin' ter my whinin'."

As Lydia and her grandmother came in, a sharp rap came to the living-room door.

"Run ter ther door, Lyddy, fer I hain't fit ter be seen. I've no doubt it's Parson Riggs come ter see yer grandpa."

Lydia hastened to open the door and saw a lady standing there.

"Good evening, little girl; is thy mother at home?"

"Will you please come in? I have no mother,

ma'am, but Grandma will be pleased to see you," and she drew forward an old-fashioned rocker for the stranger. "Please to sit down and I will call Grandma," and, making a little courtesy, she left the room.

The stranger took her seat, then cast her eyes in mental survey around the room. Everything was in order. The green paper shades at the windows was neatly draped with plain but snowy muslin curtains, a bright, home-made rag carpet covered the floor; on the opposite side of the room was a large fire-place and the mantel-shelf over it was ornamented with two large brass candle-sticks, each holding a fresh tallow-dip candle, and brass snuffers and tray set between them. A couple of pewter porringers, scoured to silver brightness, completed the mantle-ornamentation. Over the mantle and crossed, hung a carbine and sword, silent reminders of Civil-War times.

At her right, stood an old clock, its top reaching almost to the ceiling; its white dial-plate, worn in many places, gave mute testimony of its usage for years. On the opposite side, a comfortable bed-lounge with tick neatly covered with turkey red calico, and a row of pillows well shaken and patted into shape and covered with the same material, bade a silent welcome to tired and weary bodies. On a small table, stood a good-sized glass fluid-lamp, quite a luxury in those days, while several rush-bottomed chairs and a little rocker of the same kind completed the furnishings. Several gay braided rugs added much to the comfortable and thrifty atmosphere of the room.

Hearing a step, she arose to meet Aunt Rhue,

saying: "Have I the pleasure of meeting Sister Wilbur, of Lebanon? I am Margaret Filmore, of Philadelphia, and beg that thee will keep me over night in the shelter of thy home. My nephew, Philip Armstrong, has told me of thee."

Aunt Rhue stood silent for a moment, then said: "We know yer nephew, Philip Armstrong, ef so he be. Be seated, madam. I'll speak ter Father." She quickly returned, saying: "Sartin, Mrs. Filmore, ye air welcome; I will gladly keep yer over night." Then, crossing the room, she threw open a door and, motioning to the stranger, said: "Take off yer things and make yerself ter home. Ye kin jest lay 'em on ther bed fer now. Supper'll soon be ready."

The little Quakeress crossed the room. Removing her bonnet and shawl, she laid them on the bed, placed her handbag at the foot, and glanced around. The same air of thrifty, painstaking housewifery that pervaded the living-room was in evidence here. Everything was scrupulously clean, but severely plain. A neat patchwork quilt of "goose chase" pattern covered the bed; there were snowy pillows of softest down, covered with homespun linen, neatly made by hand and trimmed with a narrow edge of knitted lace. The old-fashioned bureau and the wash-stand with glass knobs were covered with homespun linen bleached to snowy whiteness.

On the wash-stand, stood a bowl and pitcher of common white delf, and a little white saucer held a piece of transparent soap. A pair of towels, neatly folded, were laid over the pitcher and, on the foot of the bed, ready for use, was laid a couple of handwoven wool blankets. Over the bureau, hung a small looking-glass, the upper half of which

was a gay picture of a little church amid the green trees. There was only one window, but it was hung with neat dimity curtains, looped back with stiffly starched bands of the same material, and a strip of new rag carpet was laid beside the bed. Everything was immaculate and bespoke the most thrifty housekeeping and careful usage. Margaret Filmore long remembered the impressions she received in that humble little room.

There was a gentle tap at the door, and, when opened, Lydia said: "Grandma said will you please come to supper?"

Mrs. Filmore followed the child into a large, clean kitchen. In the middle of the room, stood a square table. Its cloth of homespun linen was spotless. The fragrance of newly brewed tea was a delightful odor to the tired traveler. A plate of steaming cream biscuit, another of new honey, a glass dish held a pat of fresh golden butter, a dish of creamed potatoes, and a small mulberry platter held fresh eggs, poached to perfection. Cottage-cheese and fresh ginger cake, sweetened with maple molasses completed the supper that greeted the little woman in gray.

At the table, sat Jake Dunston, the hired man, who pulled his foretop and said, "Howdy," and Philip Strong, the boy who worked for his board and clothes and went to school with Lydia in the winter. Between them, sat Lydia, with hair brushed back with unusual smoothness.

Aunt Rhue, with teapot in hand, motioned to the table with the other, saying: "Set right down an' hev er cup uv tea. It'll rest yer 'mazin'. It's ther real imperial kind an' is good fer tired nerves."

When Aunt Rhue was seated, they all bowed their heads. Lydia clasped her hands and, closing her eyes, said: "God is great; God is good. We thank Him for this food. Amen. And please, dear God, bless the stranger with us this night."

Margaret Filmore looked up with moist eyes and said: "Thee is a good child, and I do feel grateful for the shelter of this peaceful home, and may the God you thanked for this food bless every member of this family."

About the time they had finished supper, there came a rap at the door.

"Come in," called Aunt Rhue. The door opened and there stood Si Newman. Removing his hat, he called out in his cheery voice:

"Good evenin', ma'am. Howdy, boys. Evenin', Aunt Rhue an' Lyddy. I've come up ter shave Uncle Nat an' give him er lift into thet new-fangled cheer. Shall I go right in?"

"Yes, Si, an' I thank ye, too. Father'll be glad ter see yer."

Si crossed the room and, in a moment, there came from within: "Jerusalem artichokes! How are yer, Uncle Nat?"

"Tip-top fer me, Si. I reckon I'm on the gain."

"Well, Uncle Nat, ez soon ez Jake's through supper, we'll hev yer out uv thar. Jake an' me'll do ther liftin' an' Aunt Rhue kin do ther bossin'."

After supper, Lydia said: "Grandma, please may I see Uncle Si lift Grandpa in his new chair?"

"Child," Aunt Rhue said, laying a hand on her head and smoothing her hair, "don't yer think yer hed better stay out here. When we air through, I'll let ye in. In the meantime, yer kin put erway

ther food an' clar away ther supper-things, an' I'll wash ther dishes while ye go in an' see yer grandpa." Turning to Philip, she said: "Don't fergit ther new lambs, Philip. They air in er strange place an' will need er little extry motherin'; an' ye had better take down ther fireboard an' kindle a little fire. Ther air is keen ter-night. Ye'll find plenty uv pine knots in ther entry."

Lydia, quietly and without a word, put away the food, cleared up the dishes, put a stick of wood in the stove, folded the white cloth neatly and replaced it with a cheery red one, gave the cat a saucer of milk, at the same time stopping long enough to give it a stroke or two; then, drawing her little chair near the stranger, she sat down and looked up into the face of the woman in gray, as if inviting conversation.

"I hear thy name is Lydia. How old is thee?"

"Yes, ma'am, my name is Margaret Lydia Wilbur, but most every one calls me Lyddy, except my school-teacher and dear Miss Lillian, and I am almost ten years old."

"Has thee always lived with thy grandparents?"

"Yes, as long as I can remember."

"Your parents, dear — does thee remember them?"

"No, ma'am; my father was killed in the war and my precious mother died when I was an infant; but she was a good mother. Grandma says so, and she knows, and oh! I love her so."

"Where are they buried, dear?"

"In the South Church graveyard, ma'am."

"Why do you say South Church graveyard?"

"Why, the Presbyterian church is on the north

side of the village and the Baptist is on the south; that is why we call them north and south."

"Lydia," called the excited voice of her grandmother, "come now an' see yer grandpa sittin' in his new chair, an' ther directions say he kin wheel himself anywhar by loosenin' somethin'."

"Yes," said Si Newman, "we've looked everywhar fer ther tarnal thingumbob, but I'll be jiggered ef I kin find it."

The little woman arose and walked to the bedroom-door, saying: "If thee will allow me, I think I can show you how to adjust it so thee can roll it at will."

"Come on then," said Si.

The little woman went in and, stooping over the chair, almost immediately caused it to roll in any direction.

"Thank 'e, ma'am. Thet wuz er neat trick an' none uv us knew it but yer."

"Thee is quite welcome, my friend; thou wilt have no more trouble. The reason I knew so well was because I spent a number of weeks once in a chair like this. I was thrown from a carriage and my spine injured. Thee will find much comfort and convenience in thy chair."

As she passed from the room, she whispered to the stage-driver: "Thee need not stop thy horses in the morning."

Si Newman winked one eye and smiled.

As Aunt Rhue returned to the living-room, the little Quakeress arose and said: "With thy permission, I will retire. I find I am more weary than I realized."

"Very well, ma'am," and Aunt Rhue lighted a

candle and handed it to her. "Good night; I hope ye will sleep well an' if ye need more kiver, thar's er couple wool blankets on er cheer, carded, spun, an' wove by my own hands."

"I thank thee, and good night, Friend Wilbur, and may God bless thee and thy household."

As Aunt Rhue left the room, she said to herself: "Well, I do declar ter man, that's the second time thet woman hez blessed this house an' its inmates, an' I'm proper thankful fer it; fer we need all ther blessin's we git at this pertic'lar time, an' though it don't put any cloths on our backs, ner food in our stomachs, it's comfortin' like, arter all."

Margaret Filmore put the candle on the stand and, seating herself, with clasped hands, pondered over the strange situation. It was long past midnight before the Quakeress slept. Memories of the long ago came trooping sorrowfully before her, reviving thoughts she had sought to forget. Unbidden tears moistened her pillow as she prayed:

"My times are in Thy hands."

The crowing of the cocks and the hollowing of Jake driving the cows to the north pasture awakened the Quakeress and, on opening her eyes, she found the sun flooding her room with brightness. Hastily rising, she bathed her face and hands in the cool, pure spring water of Lebanon, and, dropping on her knees, buried her face in her hands. On rising, she opened the door and found Lydia, clean and smiling, sitting on a stool by the window.

"Good morning, Lydia; and what is thee doing?"

"I'm reading the lesson for the day, and it is about Christ in the garden. I feel so sorry for

Him; but Grandma says every one has their Gethsemane sooner or later. Do you think so?"

"Your grandmother is right child. 'Into each life some rain must fall.' "

"Will you have some breakfast now?" Lydia asked.

Hand in hand, they went out into the kitchen, where everything looked bright and cheery. The table was set for one, as the family had long since had their breakfast. Aunt Rhue came in with her hands full of shining milk-pans and greeted her guest with a cheery smile and a pleasant "Good morning. I hope ye rested well an' our noisy clatter did not disturb yer."

"I thank thee, and I hope thee rested likewise. And how is thy good husband?"

"Wall, ma'am, he is mighty well pleased with his new chair, an' I hev got him into it already with er little uv Lyddy's help. It does beat all erbout these 'ere new-fangled inventions."

Mrs. Filmore had finished her breakfast, and, looking up to Aunt Rhue, remarked: "I thank thee, Sister Wilbur, more than I can express for thy kindness to me, and with thy permission I will tarry a day or two longer. I find it very restful here and, needing it so much for my return journey, will gladly remain, if thou wilt keep me."

"Ye kin stay an' welcome, Mrs. Filmore, fer I like yer ways, an' ef ye can put up with our homely way uv livin', ye kin stay."

"Sister Wilbur, does thee think it would harm Lydia to walk to the village this morning. I am interested in those quaint country churchyards, and would like to visit yours."

At this moment, Lydia came in singing, "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify."

"Lyddy, Mrs. Filmore would like ter go down Alden way this mornin'. Do ye feel able ter go with her?"

"O, yes, Grandma, I would dearly love to go. The chickens and turkeys are fed and the ducks turned into the run, and just see the eggs I have found this morning. Grandma, did you know Jim Buckley has just come up the west lane to help with the corn? Isn't that just fine? But Jim is such a good man to help out anyway, isn't he, Grandma."

"Wall, Lyddy, ye know Jim is one uv Alden Center's good fer nothin's, but he's allus been kind ter us. But one thing I believe an' thet is thet Si Newman's hed a finger in ther pie, sendin' Jim up ter help Jake; but run erlong an' get ready."

"O, Grandma, when we come back, may I crack some hickory nuts and make some maple candy for our guest?"

"I am ready, dear," said Mrs. Filmore, "and as thy grandmother has given consent that I tarry another day, thee need not hurry with thy candy."

"Here, Lyddy!" called her grandfather, "bring me yer hickories an' ther hammer, an' I'll crack 'em fer ye. While yer gone, yer grandma'll fix a stun fer me on ther arm uv this chair."

"But, Grandpa, dear, do you think you can without hurting you?"

"Sartin, child; bring 'em erlong."

"O, Grandpa, it will be such a help, and I can pick out the kernels when I come back. Was there ever such a dear grandfather as mine?"

"May I say good morning to thy husband before I go?"

"Sartin; I will wheel him right out in the kitchen."

"Good morning, sir. How does thee feel?"

"Fit ez er new string-fiddle, ma'am, an' I sure think, uv all ther new inventions man ever made, this 'ere chair is ther finest. I feel like er new man. Won't ye sit down?"

"No, I thank thee. Thy little granddaughter and I are going for a walk."

"Now, Lyddy, do be careful, child; don't git tired out," Aunt Rhue called after them. "Be sure an' rest well before ye start back. Ye know ye air not ther strongest yit."

"I will be thoughtful of her," the Quakeress promised.

Very soon, they were walking along the dry, dusty road down Lebanon way to Alden. An occasional shrill "cheep, cheep" of the locust, a "dry-weather fly" Lydia called it, and the lowing of the cattle from the far-off pastures, added to the interest of their walk. They stopped very often for Lydia to tell the name of the different herb, shrub, or bush, and to explain their individual medicinal qualities and the proper time of year to gather them. She also told who lived in the different houses they passed, their occupation, how many in family, and their names.

After walking about a mile, taking it easy and resting often, they came to the old south church graveyard. It was enclosed with a solid moss-covered field stone wall. They went up over stone steps, resting a moment on the top one, before descending the other side. The old church, stand-

ing like a grim sentinel in the middle of the yard, added to the solemnity. Many of the graves were sunken and overgrown with weeds, seered and brown by the touch of frost. Here and there leaned a headstone quite out of plumb, as though being tired of a sentinel's position. Many graves had field-stone markers, with name and date crudely chiseled in, and an occasional shaft of native granite was seen.

At last, they came to a plot on which were several graves looking trim and well kept, and overrun with a riot of glossy green leaves. Between two graves stood a good-sized cross, cut from a slab of native granite.

The Quakeress stood and read: "Col. Robert Wilbur; age 26; killed in the Battle of the Wilderness, May 6, 1864"; and "Margaret Lydia, his wife; age 24; died of grief, Nov. 30, 1864."

The little girl brushed the leaves from a large, flat stone seat and invited her guest to sit down. She complied, and, drawing the child near her, said: "Does thee come often to visit this place?"

"O, yes, every Sunday that I come to Sunday-school and almost every school-day at the noon hour when the weather is fine. I just love to come."

"Why dost thou love to come to this quiet, sacred place?"

"It is because she was my mother. I sit on this stone and close my eyes and pretend to visit with her. Sometimes, she comes and stands by me and sometimes she puts her hand on my head and says: 'God bless my little orphan girl,' and it makes me so happy. I am sure I shall know her in heaven by the way she looks here."

"How does she look?" the Quakeress asked in a soft voice.

"O, her beautiful hair is all waves and her eyes are so soft and blue, and she always smiles at me so sweet. Grandma told me once it was fancies or day-dreams. I guess it is, but it makes me happy."

"So you talk with your grandmother about it."

"Not very often. I don't like to bother Grandma, for it might make her sad, and she is so good. She loves mother, too, for father's sake. O, Mrs. Filmore, here comes Miss Lillian. She is just the loveliest lady in the whole world. She is my Sunday-school teacher and came so often to see me when I was sick and would read to me the nicest stories, and brought such delicious things to eat and books to read; and she has been so kind to Grandpa, he calls her Sunshine."

"Good morning, Miss Lillian," called Lydia, as she ran to meet her. "I'm so glad to see you; and this is our guest, Mrs. Filmore, of Philadelphia."

"How does thee do? I am glad to know thee, Miss Lillian. Thy little friend has been telling me of thy goodness to her, and I may add 'May every kindness rendered return in a blessing to thee in the future.' Does thee live near here?"

"Yes; I live in the gray stone house yonder, just visible among the maples." Taking Lydia's hand, she asked: "How is it, little one, that I never heard you mention this friend before?"

"Nay, nay, my friend, do not criticize thy little friend. She never saw me until last evening. I am a stranger, just traveling for pastime, and Lydia's grandparents took me in and made me welcome."

"You are indeed fortunate, Mrs. Filmore; the Wilburs are most excellent people. They never say much, but they are particularly well informed. Uncle Nat is of a broad mind, a deep thinker, and one of our best intellectual farmers. He comes of an old family as does his wife, and I have heard Uncle Granger say that, if he could have finished his college course, the world would have heard from him other than farming. They are regular church-attendants when possible, and Lydia rarely misses a service. She has a most remarkable memory and can commit more Bible verses than any child in the Sunday-school."

Taking Lydia by the hand, the Quakeress said: "We must be going, child; I promised thy grandmother we would return early. I am glad I met thee, Friend Lillian. Thy face is strangely familiar."

"I was thinking the same," Miss Lillian replied.

As Lydia and her teacher were walking along, the little woman in gray stooped and picked a fallen leaf from the grave nearest her and tucked it in her bosom. After they had crossed the wall, the Quakeress laid her hand on Miss Lillian's and said:

"I am glad I met thee, Lydia's friend."

"And I am glad to know you. Will you not come home with me and rest and meet Uncle Granger? He would be glad to see you, I know. He has friends in Philadelphia. I have heard him speak of them many times. It was there he went to school and afterward studied law with Judge Broadbent. Can I not induce you by offering the choicest of late Vermont peaches? They have just reached perfection."

"Nay, nay, my young friend; I thank thee for

thy kindness to a stranger, but we must not tarry longer. Sister Wilbur will be growing anxious," and, offering her hand to Miss Lillian, "I am glad I met thee."

Slowly, the two commenced the return-trip up Lebanon way. The sun was hot, but a cool breeze swept up the valley.

"How about your school and books, Lydia?"

"I just love to go to school," Lydia replied, clasping her thin little brown hands and looking up eagerly into her companion's face, "and I love books, too. I have 'Pilgrim's Progress' that used to be father's and Tennyson's poems. Grandpa bought it at Webster's sale, last year. One cover was off, but when Grandma papered the kitchen, she gave me some paste and helped me put it on, and now it is just as good as new. I just love it. I have read it through once. Then, Miss Lillian gave me 'Onward and Upward' for Christmas. Then, there is my geography and history and third reader. They are all as good as story-books. And there is the Bible, you know, full of the most beautiful stories."

"Does thee like history? You are rather young for such advanced studies, don't you think?"

"No, ma'am; my teacher says I am her best scholar in history and grammar, and it's just as easy for me as can be, and I like spelling, too. I have just commenced the first book in Latin."

"Is there a class for Latin beginners?"

"No, ma'am; I just saw the book on teacher's desk with all the funny-looking letters and asked her about it, and she told me how it was a different language from ours, like German and French. I

asked her if I might study it, and she said she thought a little girl like me was too young, but that she would loan the book to me, and this fall, when Mr. Armstrong was here, he caught me one day under the old bench in the corner by the worm fence on north pasture lot, studying, and he asked me all about it and said I was a good girl to want to know and learn about other languages, and that some day it might be of great benefit. Grandma says it's all nonsense filling my head with such a heathenish language at my age. What do you think about it, ma'am?"

"If thee enjoys it, dear, and it does not interfere with thy other studies, it can do thee no harm."

"I never study it until I have all my other studies and the chores all done. Then, I just steal away sometimes by myself and study a little while, for I don't want to worry Grandma, for there is so much to worry her now anyway. There's the taxes to pay and the interest on the mortgage, and all the groceries to buy, and now she is so anxious about the winter wood and how she is going to get it cut."

"How did thy grandfather break his legs?"

"It was this way. Over in the north pasture was a great beech tree. I used to call it 'The Sentinel' because it was so stately and big and stood all alone, and the sheep and cattle would always go under it for shelter from the hot sun or the storm. In the early summer, there was a terrific thunderstorm and lightning struck it and splintered it all down the trunk and just spoiled it, and Grandpa said he was afraid it would get it again and perhaps kill some of the stock; so, one day, Jake had gone

down Alden way to the mill and Grandpa took his ax and told Grandma he was going to finish Old Sentinel and cut it up for fire-wood, the large sticks for the fire-place and the smaller for the stove. Well, he was gone a long time and it was getting late, and still Grandpa did not come. The cows came up and Philip and I put them in the yard, and Grandma had started supper. Every little while, she would go to the kitchen-door, and, shading her eyes with her hands, look far toward the north pasture. I knew she was worried.

"By and by, old Patsy came loping toward the house, whining, and Grandma almost cried and said: 'Lyddy, yer Grandpa is hurt somewhar off in the pasture.' Just then Ben Binger came up the west road and asked: 'Where is Uncle Nat? Thar's goin' ter be er raisin'-bee over ter Hasford's termorrer ter git Lem's barn up, an' they want him ter come.'

"'O, Ben, I'm afraid Father's hurt,' Grandma said. Then she told him about Grandpa's going to the north pasture and about Patsy. Ben said he would go and see, and off he started. Well, by and by, he came running back and hitched up Bess to the stone-boat, put on some rye-straw, and we went back with him, and there lay poor Grandpa with a great big limb holding him down.

"Well, Ben finished cutting off the limb where it hung and we all helped lift it off and found his legs were hurt. Ben spread a blanket over the straw, and we all three lifted him on the stone-boat. I sat on the straw and held his head in my lap. Grandpa said: 'I guess I'm done for,' and Grandma said: 'No, you're not; you're all right,' and Grandpa just

smiled and fell asleep and never woke up until we had him on the bed and Ben had gone for the doctor.

"When the doctor came, he said Grandpa had fainted and that it was a mercy for it hurt so to be moved around so when your legs are broke. No, ma'am, both were not broke, only one, and the doctor called the other a compound fracture, but I think from what I heard them say it was worse than a clean break. Grandpa gets so discouraged because he can't help with the fall work, but Grandma just smiles and says: 'Why, Nat Wilbur, hain't you ashamed to complain at trifles.' But she worries just the same, and then I had to have the fever just when I was needed most."

"Who helped take care of you and your grandpa?"

"Aunt Mollie Burdick came and helped out. Yes, Aunt Mollie is good, she is. She is what Grandma calls 'a shelter in the time of storm.' "

"Is she really thy aunt?"

"No, she is just everybody's aunt. She belongs to the neighborhood and always goes where there's trouble. She made this dress and she spins yarn and knits and weaves the nicest flannel for our petticoats and the men's every-day shirts. She can spin flax, but we can't raise flax on Lebanon."

"Who takes such nice care of thy father's and mother's graves?"

"I do; I just love to do it. Sometimes, teacher lets me out at recess, if I have my lessons. My, but it must be nice to have a really, truly mother. Grandma is so good, but then you know a really, truly mother must be grand."

The Quakeress, under pretense of adjusting her bonnet, wiped the moisture from her eyes, and said:

"We had better walk a little faster; thy grandmother will be anxious, for we have tarried long." As they walked along, the Quakeress drew her hand from her pocket and placed in Lydia's hand a gold piece. "Here, Lydia, when thee goes to Alderson, buy something for your grandfather and grandmother and for thy self, that which pleases thee best."

"Thank you, but I will ask Grandma first if I may keep it," replied Lydia. "I do hope she will let me, for I never had a piece before like this. I never even saw one. Do you think it would really be enough to buy Grandpa and Grandma and Philip each a little present and have enough left to buy just one little book and some pencils for myself?"

"I think it would, dear."

Dinner was all ready for the table when they entered the house.

"O, Grandpa, are you really going to eat dinner with us!" exclaimed Lydia, going to him and nestling her hand in his. "Goody, goody! This is better than anything in the world except Christmas, unless it would be to see you walk once more."

"Thet will come in time, girly," replied her grandfather.

The table was bountifully supplied with good, wholesome, nutritious food. On the old mulberry platter lay a round of sweetest home-cured ham, flanked with fresh eggs, perfectly fried. There were mashed potatoes with cream gravy, new fall rutabagas, fresh warm biscuit and butter, a glass of amber quince jelly, cottage-cheese, and a fresh custard pie, and — what at this time seemed a luxury — a cup of steaming fragrant tea.

After doing justice to this tempting meal, the little Quakeress went to her room, and falling on her knees, murmured: "Heavenly Father, I thank thee for all thy blessings." Rising, she bathed her face and hands, rested a while, and passed out into the living-room where Aunt Rhue sat quietly with folded hands.

The little Quakeress drew a rocker near and, laying her hand on Aunt Rhue's, said in a low voice: "Sister Wilbur, wilt thou tell me of thy children, Lydia's father and mother."

"Wall, I declar', Mrs. Filmore, I'm not given ter talkin' uv family matters ter strangers; but ye hev seemed ter take such er notion ter Lyddy, I've er mind ter tell yer ther hull story." Aunt Rhue sat quiet as though in deep revery for some time; then, rising from her chair without a word, she passed out of the room. It was a long time, it seemed to the Quakeress, before she returned. At last, her slow step was heard and she entered the room. In her hand, she carried a small bundle, tied with a faded blue ribbon. Slowly, she drew the little splint rocker directly in front of her guest and sat down with a deep sigh. Then, smoothing her clean gingham apron across her knees, she proceeded to untie and open the package. A hush as of the sanctuary pervaded. Aunt Rhue had entered her Gethsemane. Carefully, she unfolded some infant clothing and as carefully smoothed out, one by one, the tiny garments.

Outside, was heard the hum of bees in the late autumn sunshine; Tabby, the tortoise-shell colored cat, was stretched out lazily on a braided rug in the sunshine by the open door; and all nature seemed

at peace. The little Quakeress patiently waited for Aunt Rhue's story. It would be sacrilege to disturb her.

At last, she looked up and said: "Pardon, me ma'am, but it's er leetle harder than I expected. It wuz er cold, blusterin' night, nigh on to seven o'clock; Father hed jest come in frum ther barn whar he'd been unharnessin' old Bess; fer he'd jest come up frum Alden. He'd been ter ther grocery an' post, an' wuz er leetle late, owin' ter some business. Ez he come in, he said: 'Mother, it's goin' ter be er real nor'easter on Lebanon ternight an' ther wind is blowin' hail Columby. We'll hev all ther snow we'll want fer Thanksgivin'.' Ther table wuz all sot ready fer supper an' I quick went erbout puttin' on the vittles. Father hed washed an' dried his hands an' wuz jest settin' down, when er thump come erginst ther door. I paid no 'tention, jest kept pourin' ther tea an' er talkin' ter Father, when thump it went ergin. I stopped an' listened; then stepped over an' opened ther door. Thar stood a young woman with a bundle in her arms, all covered with snow. I wuz scared an' said: 'Land a massy, who ever ye air, come right in.' She looked up at me, her big eyes er skinin' an' said: "Mother, Oh Mother, I've come home ter die.'

"Wall, ma'am, I wuz skairt most ter death, knowin' thet ther only womankind thet ever called me mother wuz my leetle Emily thet died years ergo with scarlet fever. Them words went right ter my heart. I drew ther poor young thing in an', puttin' my arms eround her, led her ter ther lounge, ther same one ez is standin' over thar. Wall, I took off her bonnet, an' opened her

cloak, an' thar wuz this bundle an' er leetle infant."

Aunt Rhue paused and looked past her guest far out the door. She was living in the past. Then she resumed: "Yes, ma'am, er real, livin' leetle baby, jest er smilin' in its sleep. Ther poor girl began ter sob an' cry. I took ther baby an' laid it on ther foot uv ther lounge with er piller er two ter keep it frum rollin' off, an' said: 'Pore dear, don't cry. Yer all right an' arter ye drink er cup er hot tea an' get somethin' in yer stomach, we'll her yer story.'

"Then, I jest smoothed her hair an' kissed her an' she sobbed all ther more. Father set like er stun man an' all ther time I kep' thinkin': 'Pore child, she is some runaway frum some asylum er other an' don't know what she's talkin' erbout.' I told Father ter set another cup an' plate an' fetch er chair, which he did, sayin': 'Come, Mother, bring ther pore child ter ther table.' By this time, I had got warm, dry clothes on her, some lamb's-wool stockin's uv mine thet wuz all sizes ter big fer her, an' put my best jersey eround her an' led her ter ther table. She sot down an' layin' her head on ther table, jest cried out an' sobbed an' sobbed. I put my arm eround her an' told her it wuz all right ter cry ef she wanted ter, an' I smoothed her beautiful wavy hair an' talked ter her ther best I knew how, fer my heart ached fer her in her misery, whatever it wuz.

"Finally, she quieted down." Here, Aunt Rhue carried the corner of her apron to her eyes. "Wall, she drunk er cup uv hot tea an' I coaxed her ter eat er few mouthfuls, but she simply could not.

She jest set thar, quietlike, with her big, bright eyes lookin' clear across ther room ter ther lounge whar her baby wuz. She spoke no words only ter answer some questions. After supper, I helped her up, fer she wuz exhausted, an', on our way ter ther rockin'-chair, she jest went right down in er dead faint on ther floor."

Aunt Rhue took off her glasses and the far away look came into her eyes again, and the little Quakeress looked on in sympathetic silence. "I do declar', I don't know what possessed me ter git out this bundle an' tell this story ter yer. Can't be very entertainin'."

"Sister Wilbur, I am deeply interested and am grateful to thee for the telling. Please proceed."

Aunt Rhue sat with folded hands, and, without raising her eyes, proceeded: "Wall, Father an' I lifted her on to my bed in ther recess yonder. Then, I told him ter harness Bess an' go quick fer old Doctor Thornton an' ter hurry, fer I wuz erlone. He put on his coat an' comforter an' rushed out inter ther storm without any cap. He never waited ter harness, jest threw a blanket on ther hoss an' I soon heard him go thumpin' down Alden way. I got ther camphire an' put er few drops in water an' give it to her, an' rubbed some on her forehead, an' give it ter her ter smell. Finally, she opened them beautiful bright eyes an' said: 'Oh, Mother, Robert's mother, is it really true I am here with you all right in Robert's own home!'

"Then, holdin' my hand in both uv her'n, she told me how she hed cared fer my boy when he wuz wounded ther first time an' how they hed learned ter love each other devotedly an' how her

high-falutin' mother would not 'low Robert ter go ter her home because he wuz only er pore soldier, an' she talked uv a few other things that is only fer Father an' me ter know. She said we must not open this letter until ther New-year's arter Lydia wuz ten years old. Her marriage-lines air here, too, an' they're all right. Ther leetle gal hez no occasion ter blush. She kin hold up her leetle head with ther best uv 'em. She said her name wuz Margaret Lydia an' thet ther letter would tell ther whole story.

"No, ma'am, we don't know one word that's in thet letter. We must wait patient till Lyddy is ten year old an' the New-year arter. Queer, wasn't it, thet she put it New-year arter instead uv on her tenth birthday; but we air goin' ter do jest ez she asked us ter do, pore gal. Lyddy will soon be ten, somewhar near Thanksgivin' time, fer she wuz er leetle tiny baby when she come ter me, an' I hev waited mighty patient fer ther time ter come ter solve this 'ere mystery. But ez I said, we'll wait ther full time, accordin' ter promise.

"By an' by, ther doctor come in with Father, an' by this time, ther snow wuz comin' down thick an' fast. I well remember fur, when they opened ther door, er great gust swept in with 'em. All this time thet blessed baby wuz sleepin'. Old Doctor Thornton took off his things an' warmed his hands, an' comin' over to ther bed, asked: 'Wall, Mrs. Wilbur, how's yer patient?'

" 'She's patient enough,' said I, 'an' you'd better git down ter bizness.' He looked her all over an' asked her some questions, an' I found out the baby wuz nigh on to four weeks old. He walked slowlike

with his hands locked tergether behind, over ter ther table an' prepared some kind uv drops an' give 'em ter her. Then, when she closed her eyes, he beckoned fer me ter come over by ther fire-place. 'Mrs. Wilbur,' says he, 'ther young woman is goin' ter die. Nothin' kin save her.'

" 'Die,' sez I.

" 'Yes,' sez he, 'she kin live but er short time.' Then he asked me some questions erbout who she wuz, an' I spoke up, hurtlike, an' sez I: 'She air Robert's wife, Doctor Thornton, my own son Robert's wife, from Washington, an' this leetle babe is my own granddaughter,' an' sez I: 'Doctor, I want yer ter tell ther neighbors that Robert's wife hez just got home. She couldn't git here in time fer ther funeral on account uv expectin' this leetle baby.'

" 'I will do ez ye say,' sez he; 'this air a mighty sad thing, Mrs. Wilbur, but I would like ter know who she is an' who her people air; but,' sez he, 'she ez er lady all right, through an' through.'

" 'Wall,' sez I, 'she air an honest wife; her marriage-lines air all right here, an' maybe some day you'll know more ef ye keep er quiet tongue in yer head.' He smiled an' rubbed his hands tergether an' said: 'All right, Mrs. Wilbur,' an' he's kept his word ter this very day.

" 'Wall, ter make er long story short, ther next day she died — jest fell ersleep, jest ez ther sun wuz goin' down. It hed been crisp an' cold on Leb'non thet day an' Father an' I wuz all erlone. Ther doctor hed been thar an' did all he could. She hed laid quiet like all day. Late in ther afternoon, she looked up an' asked fer her baby. Father

brought ther leetle one an' put it in her arms an' she clasped both uv her arms eround it an' a tear stole down her cheek. She never said a word, but jest kissed her an' kissed her an' then said: 'Pore little orphan.' Then, she opened her eyes an' looked up an' asked Father ef he an' I would kiss her jest once fer Robert's sake."

Here, Aunt Rhue paused and took off her spectacles, and, after wiping her eyes, she continued: "We jest broke right down an' cried an' kissed her over an' over ag'in, an' I smoothed her hair an' Father patted an' smoothed her hands. All ther time, she wuz kind o' talkin' like ter herself an' we heard her say 'Mother' an' 'fergive' an' 'baby.' Then, she lay quietlike, a while. When she looked up erg'in, she asked Father ter read ther Scriptor. Father got down ther old family Bible an' read best he could fer tears, part uv ther sixth chapter uv Matthew. Then, she asked him ter read ther twenty-third Psalm. He tried ter but broke right down in ther middle uv it. Course, I hed ter finish.

"Then, she seemed ter chirk up er leetle an' said: 'Dear Father an' Mother, Robert's father an' mother, how good you've been ter me. Take good care uv our baby,' an' thet her name wuz Margaret Lydia ther same ez hers, but ter call her Lyddy; thet, on New-year's day, arter she wuz ten years old, ter open an' read this letter an' then send it ter ther address we'd find inside. The marriage-certificate she showed ter Father an' I, only we didn't see her last name — she didn't want us to. Then, she put it in ther envelope with her own hands, an' Father sealed it an' there it is ter this day. But with her dyin' breath, she said she wuz Robert's

wedded wife an' we believed her, an' we've never tried ter pry inter her secret since an' never will till ther proper time comes."

Aunt Rhue wiped her spectacles again as a tear stole down her cheek. "Her dyin' face wuz like an angel's an' I want ter tell yer it wuz ther hardest thing I ever done, ma'am, ter witness thet pore child leavin' her leetle baby an' us—an' as fer Father, ther way he looked jest scairt me. He did everything I told him, but never er word. When it wuz all over, I jest slipped ter my knees an' prayed ez I never done before. Here wuz er leetle human soul brought ter us away off on Leb'non ter love an' cherish an' raise. Jest think uv it! Ther great responsibility I was facin'. Well, first I knew, Father wuz on his knees beside me an' he put his two arms around me an' said: 'She's asleep, Mother, but we've got Robert's leetle baby, bone uv our bone, flesh uv our flesh. Ther Lord giveth an' ther Lord has taken away, but we'll trust Him still.' Then ther baby stirred an', ez Father raised me up, he said: 'We'll do ther best we kin fer Robert's child.'

"No one ever knew what thet Thanksgivin' meant ter us, but we wuz glad ter hev ther dear leetle tot, an' so thankful Robert's wife lived ter reach home. She died, ma'am, uv er broken heart. Pore child, travelin' eround all alone, remote frum ev'ry friend, isolated, so ter speak, er stranger, with nothin' but er stranger's roof ter shelter her in her great extremity. Not er single tie uv blood thet bound her to ernother near her. But, thank God, Lyddy lived an' is here a livin' fact ter prove my story. She gits cur'us sometimes erbout her mother, but I've

felt justified in withholdin' ther facts in her case, ther pore leetle gal. The searchlight uv memory, ma'am, ez er hard thing sometimes.

"Yes, ma'am, it wuz my hands, with Father's help, thet washed an' shrouded ther pore wasted frame, fer we made up our minds thet no one should criticize one single thing erbout our Robert's wife, pore gal; fer she hed made er big an' noble fight ter git ter us an' ter right the birth uv Robert's leetle baby, God love her. Ez I stood by her thet cold, bleak night on Leb'non, my thought went racin' back ter when Robert wuz jest sech er leetle helpless baby, an' right thar, ma'am, link arfter link wuz forged in thet chain thet hez bound thet leetle baby ter us, an' we've tried ter live up ter ther promises we made, thet bitter, sad night, beside ther pore dear child thet hed traveled an' toiled through ther storm ter reach us.

"Ter change ther subject, er leetle, I want ter speak my mind thet somewhar, some one is ter blame, radically -ter blame, fer her sufferin' an' death, an' I'd hate ter be in thar shoes at her Judgment Day. Some folks blame ther Almighty fer all thar trouble, but thar's er good bit laid ter Him thet He's not ter blame fer. Why, I'd rether live all erlone, right her on Leb'non, erway frum ev'ry livin' soul, an' hev er clear conscience, than ter live in luxury like ther one I suppose disowned thet pore, dear gal fer lovin' an' marryin' an honest, upright man though he wuz pore. Don't yer think so, ma'am?"

"Yes, my friend, but maybe thee judges them, her friends, too harshly. Thee does not know how repentant they may be, and I feel sure thy love

and extreme kindness to thy son's wife and little one will be fully appreciated, and you will be rewarded some time for it."

"I know ernough erbout it an' I have my opinion erbout er heartless woman thet would deliberately break her own child's heart an' set her adrift."

"No doubt, her friends have grieved sorely about her. It will all come right some time. Thee must not doubt the justice of the Lord, Sister Wilbur.

" 'Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceedingly small;
Though with patience he stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.' "

"Wall, ma'am, thet sounds mighty nice, an' I shore do hope thet Lyddy will git ther grist thet rightfully belongs ter her; but it's gittin' late an' I must hurry an' finish. We laid her in ther old church graveyard beside our only boy who hed been buried thar erbout six months before. It were a ten days' wonder ter ther neighbors, but we jest held up our heads an' made out we knew she were comin' ter spend Thanksgivin' with us. Now, thet is all I hev ter tell yer, an', ez I said before, I am wonderin' whatever possessed me ter tell all this ter a stranger."

"I thank thee, Sister Wilbur, more than I can express. It is as a sealed book. I will not mention it."

Carefully and lovingly, Aunt Rhue refolded and tied up the little garments without another word. She was still living in the past.

Rising and gently crossing the room, the Quakeress passed out the west door, down the stone steps, and followed the little path to the gate. Through

it, she went on, and, crossing the road, went through the open bar way. Entering the old orchard, she followed a little path through deep silvery orchard grass, crossed a fence through an opening and on through the pasture down to a thicket of dogwood and sweet birch, and, a little farther on, she came to a cool shady spot, where, surrounded by stone and moss-covered logs, there bubbled forth a spring. Near-by, the last Jack-in-the-pulpits nodded their faded heads and a late yellow wood-violet raised its tiny face to the gaze of the intruding stranger.

She sat down, while the ghosts of past memories glided swiftly by, awakening both sad and tender thoughts of the dim past. Here, she communed. Her heart, filled with tenderness, caused by Aunt Rhue's story, found outlet in tears. As she raised her head, a butterfly, delicately marked lavender and black, with a touch of gold, fluttered from a branch above her and lazily winged its way out of sight. It was here the woman entered into a possible realization of her desire. Rising, she slowly retraced her steps and soon entered the farmhouse and proceeded to make preparation for her journey the next day.

CHAPTER II.

"Hurry, Mother, hand me my knapsack and let me go. My Colonel will be wondering what has kept me so long, and St. Alban will be waiting for me in our tent. There is much to get ready for to-morrow. Just hand me my gun and I'll be

off. One more kiss, Mother mine, and take good care of Bess, the colt, and the new Jersey calf. Good-by, Mother, let me go; I must be off." And the poor, emaciated, fever-stricken young soldier would repeatedly try to arise from his cot.

"No, no, my friend," said a quiet voice. "Thee can not get up. The doctor said thee must keep quiet. Please take this; it will make thy fever better and help thee rest. I will look after Bess, the colt," and thus did the sweet-faced young nurse quietly woo the delirious soldier back to sleep. Repeatedly, did she return to his cot during the hot August night and sooth his wild delirium. She could not remain by his side, for many others needed the blessed ministrations of the brave volunteer nurses.

During the week, there had been a trainload of sick and wounded soldiers rushed into Washington from the battle of Antietam. Among them was Robert Wilbur, a farmer-boy scarcely twenty-one years old, from the mountain-region of Vermont. He was badly wounded in the shoulder and was delirious with fever and pain. His nurse was a volunteer young woman from one of the best homes in Washington, a demure little Quakeress in plain gray gown; a large white apron and a kerchief of snowy white crossed her breast. But better than all was the great loving heart and willing hands to help relieve the suffering around her.

"Good morning," she greeted, as she laid her firm, cool hand on his burning brow. "How does thee feel?" and she quietly bathed his face with the cool water. "Here is some fresh buttermilk right from Aunt Chloe's churn, and she knows just how to fix it."

"Yes, Mother, I will," raved the young man, trying to get up; "I'll be there in a minute. I've just finished the chores and the wood is all ready. I'll wash my hands; then I'll hold the candle and read while you spin. Where is Father? Has he come, and did he bring the paper. No, Mother, I haven't forgotten the little prayer you taught me and I — I — I'll say it before I go to sleep. 'Our Father, who art in heaven.' O, Mother," trying to raise his hand, "you help me say it, 'Forgive us our trespasses.' Do you think, Mother, that God will ever forgive me for leaving Lebanon — leaving you and Father and the dear old home. But the flag, the dear old flag, see it float, Mother? Look, look how it ripples in the breeze. Dear Old Glory, how I love it! The stars and stripes — you know, Mother, I never did anything to displease you before."

"Hush, hush, dear; thee must take thy nourishment. I will bathe thy hands and brow and make thee feel better."

"'Dear,' did you say 'dear,' Mother? It's a long time since you said that, and will you kiss me just once to show you forgive me for leaving home and enlisting — just once, Mother."

The young woman stood quiet with folded arms, watching the sufferer. Tears glistened in her eyes; then, bending, she pressed her lips to the young man's forehead.

"Thank you, Mother, but you never kissed me there before. 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,' amen," and he quietly drifted off to sleep.

"Well, Miss Margaret, how are you and how is your patient this morning?" asked the cheery voice of Doctor Wilsey. "I do believe he is better. See

the tiny smile hovering around his lips, and I declare his brow is almost moist. You are a born nurse, and, if young Wilbur lives, he owes his life to you. Now, plenty of nourishment, sponging and good cheer is all the treatment needed here. We will change the dressings and cleanse the wound this evening when I make my rounds. How is young Hunter? It makes even my old heart ache to see all these young men mowed down just as they are beginning to live."

"Thy patient, Hunter, Dr. Wilsey, has gone home. He passed away at sunrise. Thee had better arrange to send his remains home. I have the name of the town here, and if thee will be kind enough to mail these letters to his mother and sweetheart, thee will be doing a great service to both the living and the dead."

"You are a remarkable young woman," the Doctor remarked, "and you must remember to take care of yourself. Your mother gave me a good scolding yesterday for keeping you here. I told her you were a second Nightingale and my right-hand supporter, and that I could not spare you. She said I should box your ears and send you home, but you are far too valuable for me to do that. All I ask is that you take the necessary sleep, three square meals a day, and your exercise, and we will show them what we can do. It is the most blessed work, Miss Margaret, a human being can be engaged in."

"Never mind Mother, Doctor; she is a dear after all. Tell her thy nurse is all right and please ask her to send more bandages, broth, and wine, and I will thank thee, and do think occasionally of thy

own self. These are terrible times. Does thee think thy patient, Wilbur, will live?"

"Yes, if we can pull him through the crisis, which is not far off. He has a good fighting chance. Be sure and have plenty of hot water and bottles ready to fill and see to it that there is sufficient stimulant at hand."

"Yes, sir, I am ready," murmured the sufferer. "Color bearer, did you say? Oh, that is too great an honor — to carry the stars and stripes — but I will do my best by Old Glory. Yes, Colonel, give it to me. Poor fellow, to be shot down! I will do my best. Oh, God, boys, hold me up!" panted the sufferer. "Quick, quick, the rest must see the flag till the last, and I told the Colonel I would do my best. My God, Ben, I am shot again, but you must hold it up. Hold up the flag, Ben, hold it up! You can't, you say. Then I will — it must not drag," and Wilbur tried to raise his arm.

"There, there, I will hold the flag, but thee must take this. Thy fever runs high," and, slipping an arm under his head, the nurse put the cooling draft to his lips. "The doctor says thee will be all right if thee takes thy nourishment well and keeps quiet."

The young man opened his eyes and looked up in a dazed manner, took the drink, and dropped back exhausted on his pillow. "'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,'" he murmured again. "Do you remember how little sister, Emily, and I used to kneel at your side and say, 'Now I lay me, 'This I ask for Jesus's sake'? Kiss me again, as you used to, and good night, Mother. Don't forget to tuck us in bed. It's growing so cold."

Again, the young woman touched her lips to his

forehead and again he was soon sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. After making her rounds, she returned to find her patient lapsed into unconsciousness. The dull gray countenance alarmed her. She quickly summoned another nurse, and they put up a stiff fight with death. For several hours, the partially unconscious form lay as one whose spirit had fled.

Just as the sun in all its glory sank over the hill-tops, there was a faint flutter of the eyelids, then with an effort, they opened and closed, a weak smile wreathed his lips, and he was asleep. For several hours, he slept quietly. On one of the nurse's rounds, she found him with eyes open; and he whispered: "Where am I?"

She put her finger to her lips and shook her head; then she said: "You are all right; but you have been very ill for days and must keep absolutely quiet."

CHAPTER III.

After the supper had been cleared away, the dishes washed and the hearth in the living-room neatly brushed with the speckled turkey-wing — for the chilly autumn evening necessitated a pine knot fire — Lydia came skipping in from the kitchen, exclaiming:

"Grandma, we have the hickory and beech kernels all picked out, and Grandpa was such a help. There is a whole cupful. Will you please help me with the maple candy so our guest can have some?"

"La, child, yer know whar ther maple is. Jest take ther hatchet an' break ther cakes. Moisten an' put 'em on ther fire ter melt. Don't be stingy. Take all ye want an', when it's melted an' begins ter boil, call me an' I'll be thar ter help ye out."

As Lydia disappeared, her grandmother said: "She's ther light uv this house, she is, with them quiet, womanly ways. Sometimes, when I look at her, it jest makes my heart ache ter think uv all she's deprived uv. No mother, no father, only us two half-wornout old folks ter mingle with. Of course, Philip is some company; but she's happy. She's queerlike, with all her whims an' fancies an' dreams, an' no mistake. I often find myself wonderin' how it'll all come out."

When the candy was finished, and Uncle Nat carefully returned to his bed, Lydia was putting the things to rights in the kitchen, after which she and Philip sat down to play a game.

Aunt Rhue changed her apron and returned to her guest, remarking that "ther stars wuz out by the million an' she guessed it would be fine tomorrow." She drew her little rocker to the cheery fire and sat down. The Quakeress drew her chair a little nearer and looking up at Aunt Rhue, asked:

"Does thee feel like telling me about thy brave boy, Sister Wilbur?"

Aunt Rhue arose, crossed the room to a little stand in the corner, lifted her knitting-basket and, bringing it to the fireside, sat down opposite her guest. Taking off her glasses, she wiped them on the corner of her apron, adjusted them carefully, smoothed out her apron, picked up her knitting, and said:

"Yes; ez I hev told ye so much erbout ther family hist'ry, I'll tell yer erbout Robert. He wuz er proper good boy frum er leetle shaver, jest crazy erbout books. Why, he'd ruther hev er book er picture ter look at than er stick uv candy, an' candy wuz er scarce article in them days. Wall, ez soon ez he wuz big ernough, he went ter school reg'lar, walkin' over er mile each way ev'ry day, trudgin' erlong with his leetle dinner-baskit an' his precious first reader, an' when ther weather wuz fine, he always led his leetle sister, Em'ly, by ther hand ev'ry step uv ther way.

"Yes, ma'am, I hed a leetle girl, but she died when she wuz ten years old.

"He would help Father all he could with ther chores, night an' mornin' in ther winter, an' work like er leetle nailor in ther summer. Arter a while, he outgrew ther district-school, so we pinched erlong an' paid his schoolin' down ter Alderson.

"No, ma'am, I don't know who he took arter fer so much book-larnin'. I think he must hev struck back somewhar fer it. Ye see, his Grandfather Wilbur wuz er big lawyer back in Boston an' finally er judge, an' his great-uncle, Abner Wilbur, wuz ez fine er preacher ez ye'd wish ter hear. Hev I ever heard him? Sartin, many er time an' er good many Allison's wuz great fer book-larnin', too. Yes; my maiden name wuz Allison an' I've no occasion ter blush fer it. Ther Allison's didn't run ter lawin' er preachin', but, ef any one wanted or needed his body mended er a good physic, ther Allison's took no back seat. Yes, surgeons an' doctors seemed ter run in our fam'ly fer generations.

"Now, ma'am, I think yer gittin' a leetle per-

sonal. I didn't set out ter tell my hist'ry, but Robert's.

"Robert worked hard fer his schoolin' an' wuz happy in doin' it. He would sit by ther hour an' hold er candle fer me ter spin er reel by, an', in his other hand, he'd hold er book an' study. Sometimes, ef it wuz hist'ry, he would read it out ter me an' very interestin' it wuz, too. He would be up cold winter mornin's an' help Father feed an' water ther stock, an' allus fill ther kitchen wood-box ter ther very top so ez I wouldn't hev ter go out. Saturday, he'd pitch in an' help with ther huskin' er go ter mill, er snake logs fer fire-wood. Wall, he'd jest work frum early dawn till bedtime.

"All this time, year arter year, ther expense fer books, clothing, and other things — he used ter call 'em incidentals — crept up so he got purty well discouraged ther last year. It jest seemed ez though everything under canopy accumulated thet year ter try ever'body. Ther new township corduroy road wuz built an' we either hed ter give time er money an' thet wuz ther year ther hill-orchard back thar wuz set out. Ye see, time wuz money with us an', come ter think uv it, we lost er yearlin' thet fall, too.

"One Saturday, we three wuz talkin' over matters an' Father told Robert if he wuz so sot on larnin' he might cut er few giant hemlocks an' er couple uv choice curly maple trees (he had 'em marked) an' snake 'em down Shasta way ter ther saw-mill. He reckoned they would jest erbout even up accounts fer what Robert hed done fer him. Talk erbout joy! I thought thet boy would faint, he got so white. Wall, he wuz erbout ther tickledest uv any one I ever see. He hollered 'Hurra!' an'

grabbed me an' hugged me until I erbout spilt over ther custard in ther pie I wuz makin' fer dinner. Then, he went over quietlike ter Father, an', layin' his hand on his shoulder, said, an' his voice trembled like: 'Ye air ther best father er boy ever hed,' an' Father asked: 'How erbout my boy?'

"Talk erbout work! I never saw anything like it. Late an' early, he wuz eternally at it. Finally, ther last year come. Thet wuz ther hardest — ther close uv ther course, endin' with graduation. They didn't hev so much ceremony them days, but ther wuz considerable extry expense, but I won't dwell on thet — thet wuz between Father an' me. He didn't quite approve uv some things but, with er leetle coixin', I allus won him over.

"Robert hed hoarded ev'ry cent. He wuz a conscientious student, ma'am, an' stood high in his classes. I think them perfessors must hev thought so fer when graduation time come, they made him vale — something. O, yes, valedictorian, thet's ther very word.

"Robert would hev it thet Father an' I must go ter them graduatin' exercises; so Father got Lem Edwards ter look arter ther place an' we arranged ter go. Robert wuz delighted. His eyes jest shone ez he stood an' delivered his piece an' when ther perfessors come an' shook hands with us, they said: 'Ye hev a noble son an' one uv ther best-principled young men in our school.'

"Then, when his name wuz read frum ther honor-roll, Father said thet more than paid fer all he'd done fer him.

"Certainly, ma'am, all this hed cost sacrifice, an' many ther late hours I sot, knittin' mittens

an' sale-socks; but I never counted it sacrifice; I counted it er privilege; fer what wuz thet compared ter our boy bein' well an' happy? Them years hed changed Robert frum er lad uv seventeen ter ther very edge uv manhood. He hed grown tall an' broad-shouldered an' handsomelike, ef I do say it.

"Yes, Lyddy, come in an' hev yer good night.

"Yes, ma'am, all these hard knocks an' heart-hunger arter book-knowledge hed sort uv drawn out all ther good ther wuz in him. Our preacher told Father an' me one day, when he wuz makin' his rounds, sez he: 'Yer son, Robert, is er son ter be proud uv. He hez a breadth an' depth uv character very unusual an' you'll hear uv him some day beside on Leb'non.'

"Wall, no one could work harder than Father an' Robert did thet year uv 1861. They felled trees an' cleared stumps an' burned fallows, broke up new ground, an' done er lot uv mighty hard work. All this time, Robert wuz thinkin' uv goin' ter college in er year er two. Father didn't approve uv it much, but said nothin'. Erbout this time, ther war wuz goin' on an' Robert wuz so interested he could hardly wait fer ther papers. Then come ther draftin' in 1862, an' ermung ther men drafted in this section wuz Squire Granger. He come ter Father an' offered him five hundred dollars ter go in his place. We all said no. Then Father said: 'See here; I might ez well take ther money an' go, fer, in er few weeks, thar'll be ernother draft; then likely I'd hev ter go.' Wall, he went in Squire Granger's place an' in er few months wuz home fer good, 'cause his trigger-finger wuz blown off an' his leg badly wounded.

"All this time, Robert worked ther farm an' we got erlong good except thet Father couldn't do much. Then come ther call fer volunteers. Robert wuz jest crazy ter go, but we wouldn't hear ter it. He talked uv it an' it's great necessity night an' day. Wall, ter make er long story short, he jest left Leb'non an' went ter Bolton an' enlisted.

"Ye see, it wuz this way: when President Lincoln's second call fer 300,000 men come, why, Robert wuz almost beside himself. Ther crops wuz all in an' ev'rything on ther farm wuz in prime condition."

After a few moments' silence, Aunt Rhue resumed her story. "I hev often thought since, ma'am, thet Robert aimed ter hev ev'rything ship-shape before he left.

"Yer see, erbout this time, ther Army uv ther Potomac, ez Robert called it, wuz jest fightin' fer dear life, fer thet 'ere General Lee wuz jest bent on destroyin' it an' it sure wuz erbout ther bloodiest time uv ther hull war; an' when ther news come erbout ther terrible fightin' at Malvern Hill — I think thet's ther name — an' ther terrible campaign erginst Richmond, an' how President Lincoln, instid uv givin' in ter discouragement up an' called fer them 300,000 new men — why, Robert couldn't stand it any longer; so he jest up an' left — who could blame ther boy, God love him? Not I.

"Yes, ma'am, them were terrible times them days; an' Father an' I hev been sorry more than once thet we didn't both put our arms eround our only boy an' send him off with our blessin'. Yes, it wuz hard."

Here, Aunt Rhue paused, picked up the hem of

her apron, and folded and unfolded it; then wiped her eyes and answered her guest; "No, ma'am, he never got er cent. He wuz no substitute. He wuz er volunteer an' went ez er man should. Thar isn't much more ter tell. He wuz gon nigh tew years an' then he wuz sent home in his coffin with ther stars an' stripes he loved so well wrapped eround him — Old Glory, he used ter call it." Aunt Rhue wiped the moisture from her glasses as a tear stole down her cheek. "On his coffin-plate wuz these words: 'Col. Robert Wilbur, died in the discharge of duty to his country and his fellowmen.' I hev ther plate; would yer like ter see it?"

"No, I thank thee," said the Quakeress, sobbing. "Thy son was a good son to thee, Sister Wilbur, and a brave soldier." Rising, she took her candle and, bidding her hostess good night, went to her room.

CHAPTER IV.

After the house was quiet and every one in bed, Uncle Nat lay for a long time, pondering over the events of the last two days and especially thinking of the little Quakeress who had prolonged her stay over another night, and just what had brought her to Lebanon.

"Tired out, I s'pose, needed the rest, ez she says. Wall, she's er mighty smart woman fer her years," he mused, "an' seems ter take er likin' ter Lyddy. I'm glad she does, pore leetle gal; she's kind er hed

er hard row ter hoe sence I've been laid up. I must chirk up er bit fer her sake an' git out uv here ez quick ez I kin. I kin shell ther corn fer her fowl an' crack ther nuts an' pick out ther kernels an' thet will bring er smile, an' thar's lots I kin do ter help Mother now I kin set up. By hokey, thet air chair is wuth er fortune."

Uncle Nat had not acquired culture but his nature was manly and noble. Education had been denied him by grim force of circumstances. After moving on Lebanon, he had casually drifted into the mountain-dialect as had also his good wife; but his heart was pure and true, and above it all was a most remarkable, telling personality. There was much to amuse and admire in his homely philosophy, and it was always with a throb of pleasure that his friends gathered around and listened to him.

The events of the past two days had set him to thinking. The Quakeress's mysterious visit and the unexpected gift that meant so much to him — there was something so unusual about this experience of being remembered by an almost total stranger, that he lifted his thin hands and clasping them as he gazed into the dying embers on the old hearth murmured: "I know, heavenly Father, I am unworthy of this great blessing bestowed on me, but I am sure obliged ter ye fer puttin' it inter ther heart uv er stranger ter send me this chair. I hope ye will help me git well ez soon ez possible, fer ther sake uv ther mortgage an' the intrust money an' Mother an' Lyddy."

A new feeling of peaceful rest stole over him as soon he drifted off to sleep and slept as soundly as he ever had, which was a revelation to

him when he awakened in the morning refreshed and rested.

After an early breakfast and the good-bys had been said, their visitor took her departure.

The Overland stopped at the Wilburs' gate. Si Newman jumped down and gently assisted the Quakeress to a seat in front, beside him. She soon settled down comfortably in her seat. The sun was shining and on the road and along both sides was a mist close to the earth, "that betokened good weather," Si said.

The passenger drew her shawl closely about her and, turning to her companion, said: "Friend Newman, this is a delightful morning, so clear, so bright, so fresh. We can almost imagine that heaven and God are nearer on this grand old mountain-top; don't you think so?"

"Wall, ma'am, I guess ef our hearts air tuned erbout right, He ain't very fur off at any time. Ef my mem'ry serves me right, ther good book says He is everywhar."

"Friend Newman, I would like to ask thee a question and hope thee will take no offense."

"Sail right in, ma'am. Ask ez many ez ye like, an' ez fer ez I know, I'll answer ye true."

"Thank thee, my friend. Are thee a Christian?"

"Wall, ma'am thet depends on what ye call er Christian."

"Does thee love thy neighbor as thyself?"

Si pushed his old straw hat back and ran his fingers through his grizzly tuft of chin-whiskers, and replied: "Wall, ter tell yer ther truth, some on' em I do an' some on' em I don't."

"Does thee think, my friend, thee will go to Heaven?"

"Wall, thet's ruther er hard question, but I guess I'm safe ter say I'm willin' ter take my chances with any one I've ever come ercross yet."

"May I ask what is thy idea of religion?"

"Wall, thet's somethin' uv er sticker; but ez ye've asked me, I might ez well tell yer. Ye see thar air so many tarnal dif'rent opinions regardin' religion, an' thar's so many dif'rent churches an' denominations, an' so many creeds an' 'isms, thet I don't try ter riddle 'em out any more. I jest stand pat fer what ther best uv sainted mothers taught me when er youngster. Ye see, Dad wuz erway frum home so much uv ther time thet erbout ther hull raisin's uv us children wuz left ter Mother."

By this time, the horses were walking slowly with slack rein.

"Wall, she used ter gether us eround her uv a Sabbath an' open ther old family Bible an' smile an' say: 'Which one is ter choose terday?' You see, we hed turns ter choose er Bible story. There was Josh, he wuz named fur a Bible man, Joshua. Then come Esther. Ye know erbout Queen Esther an' what she done fer her people in Bible times. Then come leetle Ruth an', ef yer remember, Ruth didn't take no back seat in Bible times neither, an' my name wuz Simon Peter. So ye kin easy see thet Mother wuz jest sot on her Bible when she named ev'ry tarnal child arter er Bible name.

"Wall, ev'ry Sabbath, she'd jest top off ther Bible lesson by us all repeatin' ther Ten Commandments, an', ma'am, I want ter tell yer thet this hagglin' over religions jest sickens me till I've jest biled

ther whole thing down ter ther Ten Commandments writ by ther finger uv God. I tell yer, ma'am, it's the hull thing in er nut-shell; ther Ten Commandments is ther kernel ter religion.

"Do I believe thar's er God? Wall, wall, thet's ther strangest question yet. Let's see. Could any one but God create er insect thet could produce honey? Could any one but God create such music ez our old Vermont songsters make? Could any one but God put sich sweetness into ther posies an' blend their delicate colorin'? Could any one but God make sich er variety uv sunrises an' sunsets ez we git on Leb'non? How erbout ther rivers an' mountains an' deserts an' gold an' silver an' ther heavenly bodies an' er million other things thet man, ef he died tryin', couldn't do?

"Wall, ma'am, I guess thar's er God all right an' I guess thet when ye come ter sum ther hull thing up, He's erbout right an' perfectly able ter operate this old universe without any man's assistance. Do ye think er feller cud love honey an' posies an' sunsets an' not believe in er God? No, siree, thar's er God all right. Why, I'd erbout ez soon believe I'd never hed er good, true, lovin', Christian mother, ez ter entertain the idee fer er minute thet thar wuz no God. I reckon yer acquainted with them chapters uv Matthew an' John an' ther Twenty-third 'Sa'm an' er good many other chapters thet make er feller feel comfortable like, arter readin'?"

"Yes, my friend, I am acquainted with them and I thank thee. Thee is a wise man."

The Quakeress was nonplussed. Who was this quaint, plain mountain stage-driver that seemed so familiar with God's productions, for it was entirely

from nature's resources he seemed to base his belief in God's existence. Surely, the Infinite Presence was inbred in this man. He seemed so filled with such beautiful sentiment that it seemed impossible for one to have and not be a Christian. What could this man not have been, had opportunity come his way?

"What of thy brother, Joshua, Friend Newman?"

"O, nothing much, only Josh's er jedge uv some supreme court out in Colorado."

"And thy sisters?"

"Wall, Esther lives in Iowa. Her man's er great bone-setter an' surgeon, I see by ther papers. Ruth? Wall, leetle Ruth's in heaven with Mother."

"My his'try? Wall, I reckon ther ain't much ter tell yer erbout me. I'm ther odd sheep in ther family, ma'am," and Si gathered a tight rein. "G'long, boys; we've got ter make thet train fer this lady."

The rest of the way, Mrs. Filmore sat in deep revery. Her mind was dwelling on the city to which she was returning, the city of toil and strife and poverty and wealth. Yes, poverty of the rich as well as the poor — the poverty of everyone that did not enjoy the sweet, unassuming fath of the man who sat beside her, this plain, homely mountain stage-driver, this man so filled with deep and holy philosophy. She had learned during her trip to and stay on Lebanon that "the glory of living did not lie in the amount of cash one was able to spend, but in the hearts cheered, the kindly word spoken, the glad and honest hand given in time of need." These were like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

CHAPTER V.

After their visitor's departure, Aunt Rhue bustled about putting the home in order. Uncle Nat wheeled himself out into the kitchen where the sun was shining through the east door. He demanded of Aunt Rhue the privilege of peeling the apples for the dumplings for dinner, and of scrubbing the potatoes for the baking, as the top of the stove was in use and no place "ter bile 'em," Aunt Rhue said.

Lydia had slipped away to a favorite haunt. To-day, it was among the branches of a great Northern Spy apple-tree that grew in a corner of the garden. She was in the habit of doing this for an occasional rare hour with her books. More often, she would creep through the undergrowth of a sweet elder a little farther off and nestle down to build her air-castles undisturbed. But, to-day, she brought no book. She just wanted to think over the events of the last two days. The visit of the Quakeress had given rise to a new train of thought in Lydia's mind. She thought over and over again every word their guest had uttered and treasured some of her sayings deep in her heart.

The description of the cities beyond the mountains, their customs and people, the churches and music, the colleges and schools, all had a charm for her.

"Yes, I am coming, Grandma," she answered, as she slid down the trunk of the old apple tree and quickly disappeared within the shady depths of the open barn-door. "I will look for the eggs right away; but I thought it was most too early. It was

careless of me to stay so long." She went about the task and soon had her basket well filled. As she went through the kitchen, she said: "I am sorry I was so long, Grandma, but I thought I would take a peep in my study in the Spy, and it was so delightful I stayed too long."

"Plenty time, Lyddy, plenty uv time," her grandmother replied, as she patted her on the shoulder. "Do ye want ter whisk ther eggs fer this spice cake?"

CHAPTER VI.

"I am only a poor soldier, Miss Margaret, but God only knows how I love you. Perhaps, I am presuming to acknowledge it. I feel unworthy and have tried to smother this great love and go back to my regiment without telling you, but I can not. I owe you double gratitude. You have saved my life and I will consecrate it unsullied to the end."

A hush of infinite silence, a silence that meant so much to them, then the nurse laid her hand on his brow, smoothing aside the tumbled hair, and from out the holy hush came the low, quiet words:

"Robert, I love thee. I will be true to thee forever."

Tears slipped from the closed lids; he carried her hands to his lips and murmured: "No, no, it can not be; it is too good to be true."

"Robert, when this cruel, heartless war is over, thee will return to me?"

"And you will be my bride?"

"Yes, Robert, thy bride. 'Thy people shall be my people and thy God mine.' "

The young soldier drew from beneath his pillow a small, worn, and crimson-stained Bible, opened it to the thirty-first chapter of Genesis, and the forty-ninth verse, and asked her to read.

Taking it, she read in a sweet voice: "The Lord watch between thee and me when we are absent one from another."

"Now, write your name, dear, and it shall be my talisman. I will cherish it ever. When I first left home for school, my mother placed this book in my hands without a word, but it spoke volumes for her. She had had it from girlhood, and it was her most precious possession. I love it, and now it will be doubly dear to me. I am a farmer's son with but little of this world's goods as yet, but I am a color-bearer, and, when I unfurl the glorious stars and stripes, there seems to come a whisper that some day I will be more worthy. Now, I will arise and prepare for the morrow. I feel rested and am anxious to be on the move. I know not how to thank you. Your love so pure and unchanging will stimulate me to greater devotion to this glorious cause and, God willing, some day I will return to you. You little know what you have been to me." Again, he touched her hand with his lips and she was gone.

Early the next morning, all who were able to resume duty were segregated on the lawn, waiting for the summons to be on the march. Just within the door stood Robert and his sweetheart.

"Now, as the hour of my departure is drawing near," Robert murmured, "I give to you this token

of love, my parting gift." Opening a tiny gold locket, he laid it in her hand. "Keep it in remembrance of me, and, as often as you gaze on the likeness within, remember that wherever I am or whatever I do, my thought is of you, dear heart."

"O, Robert, this for me! The very thing I care for most; for of all else in the whole world, nothing could be dearer than thy precious face. I will keep it and treasure it and wear it every day of my life, and in return will give thee the same," and in his hand, she placed a locket containing a portrait on ivory of herself in her nurse's garb.

He raised the hand holding, the locket to his breast and, crossing it with his other, raised his eyes to her.

"O, Margaret, my love, my own, I thank you, and I know you will prove true, for the women who carry the love of our blessed Savior in their hearts will never prove unfaithful to their lovers. Now may the Lord bless thee and keep thee."

Margaret breathed: "Amen."

CHAPTER VII.

A little way out from the village of Alden and on the west side from that which our story opens, and where the roads met and crossed, stood an old, large, square-topped brick house, which was known for miles around as "The Traveler's Rest."

It had been built well back in the forties and used for a private home for years, but fast living and gross

extravagance had at last brought it under the sheriff's hammer. It was now used as a temperance public house, patronized by tourists and travelers seeking rest and recreation, and, at certain times of the year, was comfortably filled most of the time. The cooking of Aunt Hulda Devers had a reputation that had gone abroad and had made the place a favorite one with travelers.

Sun and storm had bleached the mortar to a dead white and the bricks to a dull, grayish red. The solid board shutters were loose on their hinges and here and there where the plaster had crumbled away, a clinging place had been made for the wild Virginia creeper and bitter sweet, until it almost covered two sides of the building and made a home for innumerable birds.

There was a wide, double Dutch door in front, over which clambered a wild clematis whose clusters of silvery blossoms quivered and swayed in the breeze. Just inside was an old-fashioned entry, lighted by a narrow sash that contained diamond-shaped window-panes. These narrow windows were on either side of the door, and over the top was a fan-shaped sash window.

Along the sides of the entry ran benches of polished fat pine. Two doors directly faced each other; one opened into the exchange, or men's room, where the wayfarer could quench his thirst either with old-fashioned root beer or the pungent juice of the grape; the other opened into a large sitting or living-room. This room contained four large windows whose small square panes glistened like diamonds from repeated polishing. The floor was waxed to glassy smoothness, with here and there

large, gay, home-made rugs. Along the sides of the room rush-bottomed chairs were ranged; a large comfortable lounge, table, and several Boston rockers, completed the furniture. On this particular day, there streamed through the open doorway the cheery, welcome blaze of a fat pine knot fire. The late autumn sun brought out in rich copper and brown shades the brilliant coloring of the maple, chestnut, and ash trees that surrounded the house.

Through the small-paned windows looked out the tired face of a traveler, and as he looked, he said: "It surely must be somewhere in this neighborhood, for the description tallies to a T." He crossed the room and opened a door. At once, his attention was attracted to a subdued conversation, although he could not understand a word.

"Lemme git dar, Miss Lilyon; I'se got mighty sharp eyes, I hab, an' if the gemnan is anybody from these yere parts, I kin rec'nize 'im."

The speaker was a plump mulatto woman past middle age and, in the shadow, she stood out distinctly. Her dress was of gay gingham with turban of same material, and a snowy kerchief was crossed on her bosom. A soft, mellow voice replied:

"Your eyes are no sharper than mine, Aunt Judy, and I failed to recognize the gentleman as any one I ever saw; but we must go at once. It is getting late, and Guardy will wonder why we tarry so long," and, as she spoke, they stepped from beneath the shadow of the trees.

"I do declar', Missy, if thar ain't the gemnan dis blessed minute. Come on honey, chile, it's gwine ter storm."

"You are right, Aunt Judy, we must hurry." A

vivid flash of lightning followed quickly by peals of distant thunder and big drops of rain caused the old colored woman to grasp the arm of her young mistress and hurry her into the entry of the Traveler's Rest.

They sat for a moment; then, the young woman said: "The storm will quickly pass. Perhaps, while we are here, you had better go to the kitchen and get Aunt Matilda's rule for quince marmalade, the one we've wanted so long; but don't stay long, Aunt Judy."

The old colored woman hastened to obey and soon returned saying: "De storm am cl'ared; honey, we'd bettah be goin'."

"Very well, Aunty," and, picking up her basket, they left the house.

After supper, the stranger, in conversation with his hostess, inquired if there was a man by the name of Phillips lived in that vicinity. Aunt Hilda replied:

"Yes, sir, about a half-mile north from here, goin' toward the village. Jest take the north road as the sign-board will tell ye, go er little ways, turn to your left, and there you have Brown Gables, the home of Uncle Peter Phillips, ez he is familiarly called in these parts."

"Thank you; I will tarry with you to-night, and call on Mr. Phillips to-morrow morning."

It was only the hum of insects, yet it might have been the din of distant battle so loudly did they hum and flit hither and thither. All along the country road the pungent scent of the late everlasting and golden rod wafted up to the stranger on the cool, fresh air. As he gathered up the rein

of the horse he was riding, something brushed his cheek, and, glancing up quickly, he saw a thing of beauty. A great golden butterfly flecked with black was now lazily swinging from a tall hazel bush. The sky was beautiful with its rifts of silver, over the deep azure blue, more beautiful than he had ever thought sky could be. He stopped to gaze around him. A luminous transparency seemed spread over the landscape and completely to envelope it. At this moment, the sun burst forth in all its beauty and completed the enchantment of the scene.

"I wonder if it is much farther," the rider said, as he leaned forward on his horse. "This must be the turn," and, as he rounded the corner, his gaze was rewarded by sight of an old, many-gabled house, and, busily raking the fallen leaves on the lawn, was an old colored servant.

"Hello, Uncle? How far is it to Brown Gables?"

The negro touched his old straw hat by way of salute and replied: "Ef hits Marse Phillips youse lookin' fer, you don' need travel any fuder, fer dis 'ere place am de Brown Gables itse'f."

"Is your master at home?"

"Yes, sir; yes, sir, he am. He done be in de garden jes' er minnit ago. Will ye 'light an' hab yer hoss put up, Massa?"

"Thank you, Uncle, I will," and he dismounted, throwing the rein to the servant.

"Will you done go in de house, Massa, or set on de piazza?"

"I will sit on the piazza and await your master."

The old darkey hitched the horse; then disappeared round the corner of the house. As the

stranger dropped into a rustic chair, he heard footsteps coming through the hall, and, before he could turn, there appeared before him a small negro boy, who pulled his foretop of shining wool and said:

"Marse Phillips done tol' me ter ask yer, suh, to step out in de cedah walk, suh. It's so shady an' cool thar dat he hates ter lebe it, I reckon."

"All right, sonny; show the way."

"Mah name ain't sonny, suh. Hit's Patsy," giving his wool another tug. "Come right on, suh."

As the stranger followed him, he noted the comfort of the cool, broad hall. There was no one in sight, but the hall-table was a wonder with fresh-cut flowers, golden rod, asters, and bright autumn leaves. They were arranged in different vases and jars, ready to be placed in the different rooms. Passing through a door, they descended several steps and on to the cedar walk.

"Dat's Marse Phillips yander, suh," and the little darkey took to his heels and ran away.

A few steps farther, and the stranger was in the presence of the man he had traveled so far to see.

Raising his hat, he asked: "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Phillips, of Brown Gables?"

"That you have, sir," said Mr. Phillips, rising and extending his hand. "And to whom am I indebted for this early morning call? But whoever you are, you are welcome to Brown Gables."

"I am Ernest St. Albans, of Washington, D. C., sir, and I have a letter of introduction from my friend, Colonel Ashmore."

On taking the letter, Mr. Phillips scrutinized the writing, turned it over, and finally opened and withdrew the letter that meant either the election or

rejection of his friendship for the man who stood before him.

"So you are St. Albans, of the United States Geological Survey. I know Ashmore, all right, and a prime fellow he is, too." Then, extending his hand again, said: "St. Albans, what do you want of me, and how best can I serve you? Please be seated, sir," waving his hand toward a chair.

St. Albans complied with his request, drawing a chair directly in front of his host. Laying his hat on the arbor-seat, he stretched and crossed his leg, and waited for his host to open the conversation.

"Well, Mr. St. Albans, what can I do for you?" repeated Mr. Phillips. "As you are a stranger hereabouts and no one expecting you home to dinner, I advise you to settle down here for the day; for this is chicken-pie day and Mother will give you a hearty welcome; and say, I'll go you one better still — you, as a friend of Colonel Ashmore, are invited to make this your abiding place while you are in these parts, and I'm mighty glad to welcome you as such."

"I thank you sincerely for your invitation to remain to dinner and will accept, but will defer my acceptance until later for a longer stay."

On close observation, he found his host to be a genial but shrewd-looking man of middle age. He was clothed in a black frock coat, and, although the summer was well past, he still wore the homespun linen trousers and vest he liked so well. A broad, sunbrowned straw hat was well pushed back on his pink, shiny bald head. His left leg was crossed carelessly over the right, and he sat quietly twirling his thumbs one over the other. At this moment,

Mrs. Phillips appeared and he arose with old-time gallantry and said:

"Come, Mother, I want to introduce you to Mr. St. Albans. He is Allison's friend. You well remember Allison who stayed with us a spell last year when that gang from Washington was here, the Geological Survey fellers? As this is chicken-day, I've invited him to dinner. You know you are mighty handy at pot-pie, Mother."

"You are very welcome, sir," she said, as she gave him her hand, "and we will be very glad to have you remain. But, O, Father," she remonstrated blushing, "how can you pester so?"

She was a fine, motherly-looking woman, with abundant brown hair lightly tinged with gray about the temples, and shining brown eyes of open frankness, a firm round chin that dimpled when she smiled. She was simply gowned in a pretty chintz, and a large, white apron added to her homelike charm.

"Never mind your apron, Mother. Mr. St. Alban will understand there is much to do and undo in managing a ranch like this, with several darkies and an old customer like me to keep in order."

"No, Father, I was only going over the poultry-record with Jake, and giving out the supplies to Aunt Hetty, and, by the way, Lillian is coming to spend the day to-morrow and sent word by Judy to tell you she was coming to see you 'special.' " So saying, she left the men to superintend the serving of the noonday repast.

St. Alban thought, as he took his seat at the daintily appointed table in a delightfully cool dining-room that he was extremely fortunate in receiving

such a reception from these friends of Allison. The food was deliciously prepared and the service from the little maid was perfect, so deftly and quietly did she perform her duties.

The conversation drifted from one thing to another, when St. Alban asked about the colored servants in this remote part of the state, and how it came about. Mr. Phillips replied that, at the close of the war, a number of them were induced to migrate to Vermont, through several Southern families who settled there and, as they were contented and happy, had never returned to the southland.

After dinner, the men went out on the veranda and there, over their cigars, St. Alban made known his errand.

"Mr. Phillips, my business here is to seek information regarding a friend whom I have not seen in years. Allison told me, if such a person lived anywhere in these parts, you would be likely to know it. I refer to a young lady by the name of Miss Lillian St. Clair. We used to know each other long ago. A few days ago, I overheard a conversation in which a lady mentioned a Miss St. Clair, a person she had met recently somewhere up in these mountains of Vermont. She was extolling the beauty of the trip. Her companions asked her what part of the State, and she said she left the main line at Bolton, staged from there to Alderson, changed again, and by stage went to a little mountain town called Alden Corners. I remembered to have received a letter from Allison postmarked Alden, and it was from there he shipped my beautiful Scotch collie dog."

"By Gad!" exclaimed Mr. Phillips. "Are you the fellow that got my pet, Dexter?"

"Yes, sir, I have that honor."

"Well, you are doubly welcome to Brown Gables."

"I hunted up Allison, Mr. Phillips, and asked him if he had heard that name while up here. He said no, but if there was a person by that name, you would know it. Now, Mr. Phillips, you know just why I am here. I have told you my reason."

"But, hold on, St. Alban, I wish you would be a little more explicit."

"Very well, I will go back to the beginning of our friendship. I enlisted when the first call for volunteers was made in the late Civil War and was one of the fortunate ones who remained until Lee's surrender. During my second year, I was wounded and laid up for repairs in a hospital in Washington, and it was there I met Miss St. Clair. At the close of the rebellion, I tried to locate her but failed. All I could ever learn was that her father was killed after eighteen months' faithful service, as colonel of his regiment. His plantation was near Richmond, and all his slaves and personal property were confiscated. His only son was also killed in the second battle of Bull Run, leaving the daughter alone. She was visiting friends in Washington when I met her, but they moved away long before the war came to an end. I finally heard of them and wrote them, but they knew nothing of Miss St. Clair's whereabouts."

"Aha, my friend; but why are you so anxious to find this young woman? You see, I might know and then again I might not."

"Mr. Phillips, it is of the utmost importance to

both Miss St. Clair and myself that I find her at once, and I assure you on my honor as a man and Colonel Allison's friend from boyhood that I mean only good in locating the lady. I can go no further in detail until I have seen Miss St. Clair; then, if she so wills it, you and your good wife shall have full particulars."

"You are about right in seeing Lillian first."

St. Alban started. "You call Miss St. Clair by her first name, sir. For God's sake, if you can tell me where she is, please do so at once and end this suspense."

"Tut, tut, don't get excited. There may be more than one Lillian St. Clair, but I want to make plain to you, sir, before-hand, that if the one I know is the one you are looking for and harm ever comes to her in any way, by gad, you will have to account to me for it. I am an old man, but I know how to handle the shooting-irons yet. The Lillian St. Clair we know and love is just like a daughter to us, and I am not going to give any keen-eyed gentleman the chance to hurt even her feelings, if I can help it."

"I thank you for your loyalty to Miss St. Clair, sir, if she be the one I seek, and I only hope it is true."

"Well, stranger, I suppose it is all right, and I have no business not to tell you, for any man, woman, or child in these parts could tell you as well as I, for she is a prime favorite with all."

"Thank you, Mr. Phillips, but I much prefer your telling me, especially as you are such a staunch friend of hers."

"Were you thinking of seeing her to-day? If

you were and our Lillian is the woman you are hunting, you won't have to go far, but I advise you to stay to supper with us and take a good sleep on the prospect."

"No, sir, I thank you. I will delay no longer. Please to tell me at once how to reach her."

"Well, I advise that you leave your horse here, walk down the road until you come to a big house set among a number of giant beech and maple trees. That is the home of my neighbor, Granger. Just ask for him, if you don't see Lillian first. We shall expect you back to supper, for, by gad, I'll be blamed if I don't like your ways for a stranger."

St. Alban arose, shook hands with his host, and rapidly walked away.

"Hi, there, Pete, called Mr. Phillips. "Take this note to Squire Granger at once. Cut across lots, and don't let the grass grow under your feet. Be back here in twenty minutes. Then, we will look over the flock of Southdowns and select the ones we are to keep over."

CHAPTER VIII.

As Judy and her mistress hurried off through the shadows, Judy said: "Who you spec dat man am, honey, we seen at de Res' an' fer what am he roun' dis yer place dis time ob de yeah. He got er keen eye, he hab. You jes watch fer him, honey. I seen him roll up dem eyes ob hisn."

"Hush, Judy, you must not talk so. He is a

stranger and I heard him inquiring for Uncle Phillips."

"Now, look yer, missy, thet counts fer nothin'. Eb'ry Tom, Dick, an' Harry am 'quirin' fer Marse Phillips. Dey all seem ter know he am dead easy ter der mark, else why dey all wantin' Marse Phillips here an' Marse Phillips dar, is moah dan ol' Judy can tell. So I tell ye to watch out, honey, an' don't be givin' yore lubly converse an' sweet smile to dem all. Dey may be wildcats in lamb's clos', as de good Book says."

Later, as Lillian St. Clair was seated in her own room, she thought, too, of the stranger and wondered what his mission could be in that remote part of the country. As she mused over the event, the thought came: "I will ask Uncle Phillips tomorrow. He will tell me." Rising, she opened the door and descended the broad staircase. On a table in the hall, she found the evening mail. Picking up several letters, she stepped outside the door and, seating herself, began leisurely to open and read them.

"Well, I am very glad of this. Here is an order from Bolton for my little friend, Lydia, for four dozen butternut maple candies for a Thanksgiving party, and another for six dozen groundpine and bittersweet wreaths for Christmas. Of course, it is a long way off; but it will give the child something pleasant to think of. She is a little dear, and at times reminds me of a picture or person I have seen somewhere. I feel so sorry for her, way off on Lebanon with only grown-ups, but if Philip Strong lives there this winter, he will be company for her. I will try to see her soon. She will take pleas-

ure in anticipating the work, and it will help her over the hard places and give her some pin money. I often wonder about her.

"O, here is a letter from June Allison. Her aunt from Philadelphia has been there, and her father has gone home with her. She is alone and wants me to come and spend a week with her during his absence. She writes her father has the 'wanderlust' and may not be home for some time. I will see Guardy about it and write her, to-night. If he is well enough for me to leave and approves of it, I will go for a few days."

"Judy, go and tell Miss Lillian to come to me here on the side piazza and to please bring her pen and ink."

"Yes, sah, I'se jes gwine, Marse Granger, an' I'll tell her de same. Has ye done got all de pillers ye wants ter make ye comfort? De sun'll soon be roun' dis side ob de house an' den I'll be back torectly or send Eph to roll yer cheer into de shady cornah. Anyt'ing else, Marse?"

"No, no, Judy. Go at once and send your mistress to me. I am all right. Hi, Judy, tell Eph to bring my lemon and ice-water. I'm unusually thirsty."

In a few minutes, Lillian stood by her guardian's side and, looking in his face, saw a peculiar sad smile that caused alarm. Quickly bending over him, she asked: "What is it, Guardy, you wanted me to do for you?" Receiving no reply, she laid her hand on his, saying: "No shamming this time, for we must hurry. You know we are all going for a short drive and it is getting late." Still no response. Quickly kneeling beside him, she looked

up into the fallen face and saw there what caused her to cry aloud. Hearing a quick step, she looked up and beheld the face of the stranger she had seen the day before.

"Oh, sir, come quickly. There is something wrong with my guardian; he will not answer me and looks so strange."

St. Albans, for it was he, stooped and took the old man's hand in his and said quietly: "You had better send for a doctor at once. The gentleman is very ill."

By this time, Judy was kneeling by her master's side. "Fo' God's sake, Miss Lillian, honey, he am shorely daid. What fo' ye want de doctor?"

"Hush, Judy. Go at once and send Uncle Eph here to help carry your master into the house and tell Sam to go at once for the doctor."

Very soon, they had laid her guardian on his bed. As they did so, a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor. Lillian picked it up and slipped it in her bosom. Then she began, without a word, to chafe her guardian's hands.

Soon, there was a tap at the door and the doctor entered the room. Quickly bending over the old man, he made a hasty examination. Then, raising his head, he said slowly:

"Miss Lillian, your guardian is past help. He is dead."

Later, on removing Squire Granger's clothes, a long, thick yellow envelope fell to the floor. Uncle Eph picked it up and handed it to Miss Lillian, who immediately left the room. As she did so, she glanced at the inscription: "For Nathaniel Wilbur."

"I will wait until later and take it to Uncle Nat myself."

Ernest St. Albans, with bowed head, hastily left the room. It was no time for explanations. The hour at last had come when he felt his heart's desire was before him. He knew he had at last stood in the presence of his lost love. But here again he was held at bay by the deep sorrow that pervaded this household. He had handed Miss St. Clair his card and asked if he could be of service.

She had glanced at it and replied: "I thank you, sir, but we have many friends who will come to our assistance."

St. Albans, bowing low, left the house and retraced his steps to Brown Gables. "My God, can it be possible that I have found Lillian only to lose her again?" he murmured.

CHAPTER IX.

The scrap of paper Lillian had picked up from the floor was the one Peter Phillips had sent his neighbor Granger by the colored lad. As she removed her waist at nightfall, it fell to the floor. Old Judy stooped and, picking it up, asked:

"What this yer, honey chil'? Any count er shall Judy fling it in de grate? It done fall when ye took of yo' waist."

"Let me see it, Judy." Taking it, she glanced at it and at once recognized the slip of paper. On reading it, her face paled, and, opening a bureau-

drawer, carelessly threw it in, saying: "It is of no consequence, Judy. Please hurry and bring my dressing-gown."

"Now, see yer, Miss Lillian, chil'," laying her wrinkled hand on her shoulder, "cain't yo' trus' ol' Judy any more, she as done nussed yo' frum a leetle baby, an' who lubs yo' as her life. Cain't yo' trus' her any mo'? Dar ar piece ob papah ye say am no consequence. Cain't fool ol' Judy, honey chil'. Why did yo' purty cheek pale an' yo' shakin' dis 'ere minnit like an' ole Virginny ager. Cain't yo' tell ole Judy whut's troublin' her lamb? Don't cross no deep watahs till ye gits to um, honey."

"There, there, dear Aunt Judy, don't worry any more. There is nothing in it that will harm me, and perhaps something that might make me very happy. I will not go down again to-night. Prepare and bring me a cup of tea and a cracker, and when you come up for the night, tell Uncle Eph I can see no one to-night. Judy, be sure to see that everything necessary is prepared for the comfort of those who are to stay here to-night. Also, tell Uncle Eph to see that everything is secure as usual before he retires."

Thus dismissed, Judy left the room, muttering to herself: "What fur that pestiferous young marse done come roun' here fur? I'se feared he's goin' to 'noy my young mistress. I'll tell Eph to keep dat eye ob hisn peeled in his direction. What fer he don' come roun' yer? O, Marse Granger, what fer ye done die 'fore my young misis was done settled fer? Pore lil' lamb, her sweet heart am jes breakin'. Cain't fool ol' Aunt Judy nary time. I jes feel it in my ole bones, dat scrap ob paper consarns dat

harnsome young marse; but whar did it come frum?"

As Judy left the room, Lillian took the scrap of paper from the drawer and smoothing it out read: "The devil's to pay, Granger. A young man has just left here in search of Lillian St. Clair. I don't know his business, but his name is Ernest St. Alban. Thought I'd let you know. Phillips."

Lillian shook as with a chill as she refolded the paper. "Oh, God, my Father, what does this mean! The dead come to life and the living dead, all in the twinkling of an eye. Help me, dear Lord, as no one else can. What does it all mean? Can it really be my Ernest?"

A knock at the door announced Uncle Eph. "Here, Miss Lillian, am a lettah done fotched by Marse Phillip's Pete dis bery minnit, an' he say he mus' wait fer an answer."

"Very well, Uncle Eph, return in half an hour." As the door closed, Lillian crossed the room, stirred the fire, lighted a candle, sat down, and turned the envelope over and over. Finally, she broke the seal and read:

"Miss St. Clair, Lillian: May I come to you at once?"

¶ "Ernest St. Alban."

Lillian tremblingly replaced the note, crossed to her desk, drew forth her writing material, and hastily wrote a few lines, placed them in an envelope, and silently waited for Uncle Eph's return.

When the old man came back, Lillian said: "Please give this to Pete; and, Uncle Eph, look after everything as your master would have you."

"Yes'um, Miss Lillian, I'se done eb'ryt'ing, but

say, honey chil', cain't ol' Eph sleep on the cot outside yo' do' ternight?"

"Thank you, Uncle Eph, but Aunt Judy will sleep on the couch here by me, and now good night. Tell Sam to be sure the horses are all right."

CHAPTER X.

The news of the sudden death of Gideon Granger, justice of the peace and deacon in the church, was quickly passed around, and much speculation as to his affairs was caused. Every barrel-top and cracker-box was duly occupied by regular loafer or casual customer in Rube Steven's general store that night, and the post-office and tavern had their full quota as well.

A death in Alden Center was a rare thing, but such a sudden rendering of soul and body as Gideon Granger's was indeed a shock. The probable amount of his worldly goods was hinted at, and the wonderment of who would get it was discussed, and finally what would become of his ward, Miss Lillian.

"By cracky, I declar' to goodness, I would really like ter know what will become uv the gal," said Uncle Rube.

"Wall, Uncle Rube, I'm su'prised. You needn't be in such a hurry tew dispose of Miss Lillian," said Si Newman, as he called for a plug of Durham twist. "I reckon ef I know myself, she'll be well looked arter. I reckon when the ole Squire's last

will and testament is read out, ye will all open yer peepers."

"Now, look yer, Marse Newman," said old black Eph, as he tugged at his gray wool, and who had just come through the door in time to hear the last remark. "What all you'se tellin' 'bout my ole Marse Granger. Wa'n't he allus a frien' to de whole bunch ob ye? Did ye eber go to him fer a favor an' come away widout it? Now, my ole Marse Granger is shore daid, but ye better let his mem'ry res' while his pore body's out'n de groun', an' I jest wants ter tell yer, yo' needn't worry 'bout my young missis while ole Eph and Judy's livin'. Better let 'um res'," and, with this trust of loyalty to his dead master and living mistress, he left the store.

Saturday morning dawned clear and crisp, with sun shining brightly. By ten o'clock, the time set for the funeral, the house was filled to overflowing. Never had there been such a funeral in those parts. Friends, neighbors, sightseers, those who had never been privileged to see the interior of the Grange, were there in full force. The gossip-monger was there, too, for Alder Center was no exception to the rule at the average country funeral. Friends came for miles to pay their last respects to the dead. There were all classes and colors, from the humble wage-earner to the lawyers and judges from Alderson and Bolton, and a couple came even from Boston.

An unusual silence pervaded, for this was a very unusual funeral, inasmuch as there was not one blood relative there. He died as he had lived for years, a recluse. No one could ever remember the

time when a relative had visited the Grange. Lillian St. Clair was the only real mourner present.

After the funeral service, hired pall-bearers carried his body, according to the dead man's request, to its last resting place in the old South church graveyard, and his funeral was as much a ten days' wonder as his sudden death had been.

The will — no one seemed to know anything about it and many there were who went away sorely disappointed, for no mention whatever had been made of it.

CHAPTER XI.

Twenty-four hours had now passed since the funeral and the terrible responsibility and anxiety that had engrossed Lillian was over. Everything had been done according to the old man's wishes. There was no more watching, no more planning; just the dull idleness that is the first awakening after a great loss was creeping over her and enveloping her. There was nothing she could do. The servants had settled back into their ordinary ways. The gloom of death had vanished. The windows and doors had been flung wide open. The sun had been invited to enter. Fresh autumn flowers were placed in all the rooms and every vestige of sorrow was banished.

Lillian was alone. The harrowing thought of her loneliness, her desolation and homelessness after the morrow rushed over her and made it all the harder

to bear. There was no one on earth to whom she could go. Her only friends were the humble servants unto whom she had ministered from infancy, and those, she thought, could offer her nothing but gratitude and love. She tried to decide what would be best for her to do, for Judge Palmer from Bolton was coming on the morrow to read the will, and then she must leave the dear old Grange she loved so well, the roof that had sheltered her for years. She fully realized that she had no legal right there nor was there any propriety in her staying on longer.

The day after to-morrow, she would go and talk over the situation with her friends, the Phillips. After that, she would rent a little cottage in the suburbs of the village where she could go and take faithful Aunt Judy and Uncle Eph until she could make other plans to leave Alden and go out into the world, the great busy world, where she would create a place for herself.

Squire Granger had gathered together for her the remnant of her father's possessions, converted it into ready cash, and invested it. Lillian did not know the exact amount, and felt it could last only a short time, if she lived in idleness.

A knock at the door aroused her, and at her summons to enter, Uncle Eph opened the door and said: "The young gemnan, Marse St. Alban, am in de lib'ary, Miss Lillian, and wants to see yo', honey."

"Ask him to excuse me this evening," she began, but on second thought, decided it would be as easy now as ever. So telling the servant she would be there at once, she closed the door, clasped her hands, and tried to prepare herself for the trying ordeal. She had asked him to be alone in her sorrow. He

had respectfully obeyed her request, and now she must see him. There was much need to be calm. There was pride to summon. The great sorrow she had passed through was vividly present. Now, a last prayer for guidance to bridge the gulf, that great, yawning gulf of years, that separated the present from the past. What should she do?

At last, she arose and passed down to the library, self-possessed and calm. It was twilight; the room was dim; she could hardly see her visitor's face. As St. Alban came toward her with out-stretched hand, he was shocked by her cold, calm voice.

"Do you mind the twilight? If so, I will ring for candles."

"Not at all," he replied, reseating himself and thankful for the twilight. "Miss St. Clair, I hesitated some time," he ventured, "about intruding, but could wait no longer."

"That was why I respected your call and came down to see you," Lillian replied. "I thought you were anxious to return home and would detain you no longer."

"I am anxious to return home, but still more anxious to take you with me. My God, Lillian, why this beating around the bush? It is maddening. I love you as never before, with all my soul — I beseech you to hear me. I have been on the rack for years trying to locate you and place you where you rightfully belong in my heart and home. Tell me that you give me, at once, the right to claim you as my wife and ever more smooth out the rough places in life. No one but God knows what I have endured."

"You are somewhat dilatory, Mr. St. Alban, in

claiming your right. It is nearly eleven years since I last saw you, and time has worked many changes. I am free to confess I have resented your silence."

"For God's sake, Lillian, allow me to explain and give me the benefit of a doubt that I am not as cruel as the past shows me to be. I have searched for years, north, south, east, and west for a trace of you; but not once have I succeeded until by chance, a few days ago, I heard your name mentioned and followed the clue. You will remember when Bob Wilbur and I left you and your friend after we were married; well, in less than twenty-four hours, Bob and I were separated. He was badly wounded and taken with others to a hospital somewhere. I never saw him after. I was taken prisoner, sent to Libby prison, Richmond, and was kept there six months and more. What I suffered there in mind and body is past relating.

"On being exchanged, I was soon put in fighting order and took my place in the ranks again. About a year after, I heard that my friend, Bob, was killed, but never learned any particulars. I have inquired of hundreds of strangers, and have written dozens of letters, but never a clue of you or Miss Filmore. After the close of the war, I learned that Miss Filmore had disappeared from home with no trace or clue and had never been heard of since. Her mother never mentions her name, I hear, but has grieved and watched and prayed for years for her return. I learned by chance of the death of your father and brother, and, as soon as it was possible, visited your old home only to find it in ruins and deserted, with no trace whatever of your whereabouts. I have traveled aimlessly weeks at

a time, peering into the face of every fair young woman, hoping to find my lost love."

"Stop, Ernest. I, too, have suffered. After the death of my twin brother, whom I adored, I had brain fever and was sent to my old Virginia home. I was barely convalescent, when my father was wounded. I hastened to Richmond, but was too late. The nurse gave me his last instructions: they were that I come to his old friend, Gideon Granger, whom he had made my guardian. She also gave me a sealed letter for my guardian. I hastened back to my old home, only to find it in ruins, completely devastated. I had hoped to stay there and recuperate. I occupied a cabin till Lee's surrender; then, in company with Aunt Judy and Uncle Eph, neither of whom would desert me, we came to dear old Uncle Granger, who has been the kindest and most considerate of guardians. I longed to know what had become of you and my dear friend, Margaret. I learned the man she married was seriously wounded and had sent for her. Afterward, the paper reported him among the dead. Of my friend, I have never heard, as I had no acquaintance with her mother and never even saw her; knowing of her stern Quaker pride, I never tried to find her. Oh! the ravages of that terrible war."

"Lillian, I am here to claim you. You are mine by the holiest tie God ever permitted man to possess. I come to you in your extremity and sorrow, to plead for my heart's sake and to tempt you, by the love and luxury I can offer you, to come to me, to endure my love and allow me to repay you for all the suffering of the past years by the truest, holiest love an honorable man can give. If you

prefer, I will woo and win you gradually as a bride should be won. You shall be wife in name only until I can prove to you my faithfulness and love. Only come to me at once and I will work but for one aim, and that will be to restore the old love and affection you once held for me. Only try, dear heart. I will take the risk of teaching you to care for me again. You must satisfy yourself that I am what I represent myself to be. Go yourself or send some friend to search my record. But I can assure you that I have been just as loyal to our marriage-tie as though we had never been parted.

"I beg of you to give me the right to protect you now in your hour of extremity. You may have felt neglected, dear heart, but I was not to blame. Others may have a formal alliance of love, but ours is a tried and trusted league of tender, thoughtful, though separated hearts. We still have loyal hearts, hearts to understand under trying circumstances, hearts that feel though far apart. I feel that the past years of suffering and sorrow are only the beginning of an endless future of love for each other. We will try to remember that it is the hand of God alone that weaves the pattern that He requires in the web of lives such as ours have been. His dispensations that have seemed afflictions to us have only prepared us that we may best do His work. Our afflictions, our trials, our sorrows, dear, these are the little threads of gold which, when woven together in the web of life, will gleam out brightly in the future pattern of the life God will approve of. I have the most explicit faith in your past."

"Oh, Ernest, I thought I had buried my love forever, but you shame me by your pure love and

devotion. The old love has been resurrected. Let us live to know and care for each other once more. You speak of teaching me. I assure you, you will find an apt and willing pupil, for my love has known no change. I have waited and watched for your coming for years." With a burst of joyful tears, she arose and advanced into his open arms. Raising her eyes to his, she said: "I love you, dear, and all I ask for and want is only you and those dear old mountains to make me happy."

"Thank God!" St. Alban exclaimed. "You are mine."

CHAPTER XII.

"Aunt Judy, please tell Uncle Eph I want him, and then return to me."

Very soon, the two old colored people came slowly to their mistress.

"Uncle Ephraim, saddle Jerry and take this letter to Mr. Nathaniel Wilbur, on Lebanon, and tell Aunt Rhue I will be there in a few days to see them. When you return, come directly to me."

After a moment's silence, Aunt Judy looked up with a troubled face and asked: "Wha' fo', honey, is that strange gemnan aroun' here so much? It seems mighty strange yo's so took up wid him. Bettah beware, honey chil', ol' Judy knows. This 'ere worl' am sutney cur'us, but de Lawd knows all erbout dos t'ings, an' ye know, honey, He ain't got nuffin else ter do but ter riddle dem out ter

suit Himself. An' chil', don't cross de deep watahs till yer gits ter 'em. De good Book says: 'De Lawd furnishes de temper fo' de shorn lamb,' an' sho'ly yo' am jes' shorn to de hide. But nevah feah, honey, de brightes' cloud am shore to hab the darkes' linin'. Ol' Judy and Eph done goin' ter take keer ob our lubly young missis. We hab sabed all de money Marse Granger done gib us an' we kin wo'k yet, honey."

"O, you dear old Aunt Judy! I love you and appreciate your kindness; but you must not worry so about me and the young gentleman. He is going to take care of us all. Since Uncle Granger has given me this dear old home and all its contents, we will always spend our summers here, at least," and Lillian proceeded to tell Aunt Judy the particulars concerning Ernest St. Alban and their plans for the future.

CHAPTER XIII.

Slowly, Nathaniel Wilbur turned the letter Uncle Eph had brought him over and over again. Then, going into the house, he said:

"Mother, Uncle Eph hez jest brought this letter an' er note frum Miss Lillian."

Aunt Rhue readjusted her spectacles and stood arms akimbo.

"Fer ther land's sake, Father. What do yer suppose it means?"

"Wall, Mother, it means thet this 'ere letter is

frum ther dead. It wuz in ther Squire's pocket when he died, so Lillian writes."

"Ye hed better read it at once 'fore Lyddy comes back. She's jest gone ter Silverbeech Holler fer more ferns."

"All right, Mother, here goes."

He leisurely broke the seal and proceeded to read the communication. After some time, Aunt Rhue heard him exclaim:

"Jerusalem crickets! Thunder an' lightnin'! This beats all I ever hearn tell uv." This quickly brought her to his side.

"Nathaniel Wilbur, do stop yer swearin' an' tell me what's ther matter."

"Matter? Why ther Lord Almighty hez took holt uv affairs fer us, Mother, an' made ol' Gid Granger own up ther corn. Jest listen! Air ye plum sure there's no one around?"

Uncle Nat took off his steel-rimmed spectacles, polished them with his red bandanna, readjusted them, ran his bony fingers through his hair and beard, and said: "Thunder an' lightnin', Mother, I'm ez weak ez er rag."

Aunt Rhue drew a chair and sat down opposite, with eagerness written over her face. Uncle Nat smoothed out the letter, turned it over, and began to read:

"Friend Wilbur:

"I have felt for some time that I was not long for this world and am trying hard to make my peace with God. I am actually trembling, Nat, as I set myself about this task of confessing and restoring to you your honest legal rights. It is the one crime I have committed in my whole life, and I now

cry out for mercy, but I am afraid you can never forgive me, for I have lived this black lie for years and robbed as honest a man as ever lived."

"Fer th' land's sake, Father," interrupted Aunt Rhue. "Wuz Gideon Granger crazy when he writ thet? No wonder he died sudden."

"Now, Mother, keep cool, an' ye'll open yer eyes wider yit." And he read on:

"You will remember, Nat, when the first draft was made in the late Civil War, the draft that compelled men to go to war or send a substitute. You will also remember how I shunted off the track of loyalty to my country like a cowardly craven, and hired you to go in my place as my substitute? You will also recall some special work you did for your country that counted much for glory, but of which little mention was ever made. Several years ago, out of gratitude to you, I commenced trying to get a pension for you, with back pay from the time you were wounded and sent home; and God knows, Nat, I was honest enough in the endeavor and truly meant to do you a good turn and surprise you if I succeeded."

"Wall, I never," Aunt Rhue ejaculated, with uplifted hands.

"As Justice of the Peace, I was favorably situated to transact all business necessary to secure the papers without your knowledge and, when the time came to have your signature, why, I just copied your name as you had written it here in my office when we were transacting legal business. Pardon the word, 'copied,' Nat, for it is hard to write 'forged,' and yet it is branded into my soul so that I feel like a forger of the blackest dye.

"My God, old friend, to think of a Granger doing such a thing as that, daily living a liar and forger. Well, when the time came that proved you were a regular pensioner and entitled to back pension, I thought I would send for you at once, but the temptation at that time for money was so great, I throttled the honest thought and forged your name again, thinking when the check or order came, I would surely send for you. About that time, a mortgage on the South Bend farm was due, and nothing to meet it with. So I took the money (your money, Nat, money, mind you, that you spilled your blood for in my cowardly place) and canceled that mortgage. Oh, God, if I could only undo that crime!

"Well, I kept on, quarter after quarter, forging your name and signing mine with the same pen until I had received many hundred dollars that rightfully belonged to you. By this time, I was afraid of you — yes, actually afraid of you, coward that I have been. I was afraid of the law, afraid of God, and so I kept silent.

"Finally, I could stand it no longer; so I wrote to the United States Government that Nathaniel Wilbur was dead, no heirs; but that did not satisfy; it has continued to haunt me day and night ever since. Verily the quotation that reads, 'The wages of sin is death,' will be verified in my case, for I know I am not long for this world.

"I am enclosing a confession legally drawn up and signed, to be sent to the Pension-Office in Washington when I am dead; a confession that will restore your pension with back pay since I quit, since the time I lied and wrote you were dead — a pen-

sion that will relieve your mind of taxes, interest money, and a few other vexatious things. I am also enclosing a check for five hundred dollars, the amount I owe you for pension-money received, and a deed personally made out and signed for the Simon Ross farm property out Lebanon way, the farm that adjoins yours.

"I have notified the Bank of Bolton, in a paper to be handed in when I am gone, concerning the check which will be duly honored by cash when you sign and present it. There is just one thing, old friend, I beg of you with my dying breath: Don't tell any one but Aunt Rhue, and I beg for forgiveness a thousand times for the great wrong I have done you and yours, for I have suffered untold punishment. Again, I humbly implore God and Nathaniel Wilbur to forgive the double life I have lived and blackened by forgery and wrong.

"Gideon Granger,
"Justice of the Peace,
"Alden Center, Vt."

"Attest:

"Peter Phillips.

"Lillian St. Clair."

Uncle Nat wiped the perspiration from his wrinkled brow and asked: "Now, Mother, what do ye think uv that?"

"Wall, I'll jest tell ye, Father, I think it's best ter foller ther Golden Rule in this case. Mum's ther word. We'll jest do ez we'd like ter be done by, an' may God hev mercy on Gideon Granger's soul."

"It's er tough pill ter swallow, Mother, but I

guess yer erbout right. We'll jest dump this tarnal confession inter ther fire; fer I guess it's graven into our souls all right."

"Why, Nat Wilbur, ye'll do nothin' uv ther sort until thet pension is our'n, an' thet deed is recorded safe on ther docket at Bolton. I guess thet leetle verse Lyddy likes so well will jest erbout fit in here:

" 'Thar's a wideness in God's mercy
Like ther wideness of ther sea.
Thar's er kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.' "

CHAPTER XIV.

The winter that year made an early entrance to the mountains. It came at first with great, heavy dark clouds and gusts of snow that piled and drifted into huge winrows and it was all Philip could do with Uncle Nat's feeble assistance, to keep open the paths to the barn and woodshed.

Fortunately, there was an abundant supply of fuel. A wandering band of Canucks in search of work had been hired. Some snaked, with old Bess, many logs and butts from the west timber lot, while others with ready hand at ax and saw before many days had filled the large wood-shed and cord after cord ranged in even rows beside it. Great logs of beech and maple and birch would make lasting fires for the fire-places and would smolder to finest charcoal, that, with a generous sprinkle of ashes, would hold fire well into the morning.

Occasionally, the weather would change, storms cease, and the bright sunshine brought out in sharp relief the distant mountain-summits wrapped in one dazzling mantle of snow. Especially beautiful was old Phantom top, with its deep lines and shadows.

When possible, Philip had taken Lydia to school with old Bess hitched to the pung. They would nestle down in a bed of clean straw with a generous supply of home-made wool blankets. Lydia, with a warm stone at her feet and a baked potato right from the hot bed of charred coals, in each hand, defied the cold and enjoyed rather than dreaded the daily trip. Many a happy hour for both was thus passed.

Since the death of Squire Granger, several months before, Uncle Nat had paid off one-half the mortgage and interest in full as it came due, much to the amazement of old Silas White, who had patiently and eagerly watched for the chance to close up some deal whereby he could secure for his own the Wilbur place, the best farm on Lebanon. But Uncle Nat was wise, and when old Silas said, rubbing his hands together: "Nathaniel, ye needn't put yerself out tryin' ter pay anything on ther mortgage, jest keep up ther intrust," it made Uncle Nat smile, but he replied:

"Thank you, Silas, ye air kind, but er leetle pinchin' here an' thar ter git erlong an' help lower ther intrust is my idee of gittin' erlong. It goes ruther tough at ther time, but it's comfortin' in ther end," and he planked down two hundred and fifty dollars in cash.

"I'll be gol darned, Nat Wilbur, ye take ther strength all outen me. Why, I'm ez limp ez er

rag. Whar in thunder did ye git thet cash? Ye must hev struck er gold mine on Lebanon er hed er wind-fall."

"Now, look here, Silas, them's all honest dollars an' ye well know I've hed no dowry," said Uncle Nat, as he gave his comforter another hitch and buttoned his great coat to go.

"Don't be in sich er hurry, Nat. I think ye jest better pay an even hundred this time. Ye see, ye might need er little ready money fer spring. I happen ter be er leetle forehanded jest now, an' I'll be glad ter help yer out."

"Thank you, Silas, but I kin spare it very well."

"Say, Nat," and Silas pushed his coonskin cap back and scratched his head, "I've heerd something erbout yer tryin' ter git er pension. It's all tom-foolery, Nat. Yer time an' money thrown erway ev'ry bit lost. I heerd down ter Bolton last week ye wuz tryin'."

"Wall, I guess ye heerd erbout right, Silas. I am tryin' fer a pension an', ef I do git it, ye an' I'll be quits next intrust time."

"No hurry, no hurry, Nat; take all ther time yer want. I allus like ter 'commodate er neighbor; but, say, do yer want ter sell yer farm at er good figger?"

"No, Silas, it's er good place an' yields er good livin'."

"Wall, Nat, I've heerd ther farm next yourn thet belonged ter Squire Granger ez fer sale. I guess I'll buy thet, fer I'd sure like durn well ter own er farm on Lebanon."

"I don't believe yer kin buy thet farm jinin' mine, either, fer I don't want ter sell."

"Thunder an' lightnin', air ye crazy, Nat? What

do ye mean? I'd like ter know what you've got ter say erbout it."

"O, nothin' much, Silas, only yer better s'arch ther docket down ter Bolton 'fore ye talk much erbout buyin'. Ye might git disappointed," and Uncle Nat left the room, smiling.

It was only two days before Thanksgiving, and the snow was coming down in soft feathery flakes. Uncle Nat and Philip had gone down West Alden way, snaking some logs to the saw-mill to have some lumber sawed, just the right length to build a new lean-to on the east side of the barn, and were coming back by the general store and post-office. Aunt Rhue was busy frying doughnuts, and would give an occasional peep in the oven to watch the process of baking, for there were spicy mince pies, and the rich golden hue of the fat pumpkin must be browned to a turn. The cranberry sauce, well sweetened with maple sugar, was simmering on the back of the stove, and on an adjacent table, the plump yellow body of a perfectly cleaned and trussed turkey was lying ready for the filling on the morrow. A delightful spicy odor pervaded the clean kitchen as the busy housewife stepped lively about her homely tasks.

Lydia had not gone to school that day. Aunt Rhue had needed her. She had finished all the tasks her grandmother had planned for her, also her sums and geography. She had brushed up the hearth with the speckled turkey-wing, beat up the feather cushions on lounge and rockers, brought in and arranged the great bunches of barberry and bittersweet Philip had cut for her, and had daintily arranged them in pitcher and bowl.

"Grandma, how old was I when my mother died," she asked.

"La, child, what put sich a question into yer head this cold, stormy day?"

"Won't you please tell me, Grandma? Other little girls know about their mothers."

"Wall, Lyddy, jest let me think. Ye war erbout er month old an' a leetle bit bigger than old tabby cat over there."

"Did my mother die here in this house. Grandma?"

"Yes, Lyddy, she did. She put ye in my arms an' said: 'I give my baby ter you, Mother.' Now run erlong an' finish yer jobs an' I'll tell ye ther rest ernother time."

"Just one more question, Grandma. Have you a picture or anything that belonged to my very own mother?"

"Yes, Lyddy, I hev, an' ye shall hev them some day fer yer own. Now, run erlong, child. Yer grandfather an' Philip will be here soon, cold an' hungry. The wind is risin' an' it'll be cold on Lebanon ter-night."

"Thank you, Grandma. May I kiss you just once?"

"La, child, what makes yer act so?" But she stooped and pressed the young, fresh face against her wrinkled cheek.

"That makes me feel better, and you know I really belong to you because my precious mother gave me to you. I love you, but oh! I wish I had a mother. If it is clear to-morrow, and I go to school, do you care if I carry and put some of those beautiful green leaves and bright berries on Father's and Mother's graves?"

"Yes, Lyddy, ef ye want ter," and Aunt Rhue turned and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "Pore little thing, jest ten year an' er leetle over," she murmured as Lydia left the room.

Soon, the tinkle tankle of Bess's solitary bell heralded the return of the men folk, as Aunt Rhue called them. Lydia scampered to greet her grandfather.

Uncle Nat came in, after stamping the snow from his feet in the little entry. He slowly unwound his comforter, hung up his cap, unbuttoned his great coat, and hung it on its customary peg. Lydia putting her hand in his, said:

"Here, Grandpa, is your chair all ready for you, and the little cricket to put your feet on to warm and dry them before the fire."

"Thankee, Lyddy, ye air er thoughtful child. Jest see what I've got fer ye," and he slowly drew a letter from his pocket.

"O, Grandma! a letter, a really, truly letter!" cried the child. "May I open it now or wait until after supper?"

"La, child, open yer letter. Set right down by yer grandpa, an', if ye can't make it out, he'll help ye."

Lydia was soon curled up on the rag rug before the fire. Slowly, she opened it, then carefully spread it out, smoothing out the creases. Then, leaning her elbows on her knees, and holding the letter in both hands, read aloud:

"Dear Lydia:

"I can not resist the temptation to write thee a letter and send greetings to thy grandparents in return for all the kind hospitality meted out to me

when on your far-off Lebanon. Thy little face comes often before my mind's eye, and I find myself longing to hold thy little hand in mine.

"The maple nut candy was delicious and the honey thy grandmother tucked in my luncheon-box was greatly appreciated. The little fern from Silver-beech Hollow, near that beautiful spring, is growing. Two tiny frond heads have begun to show and the whole fern looks beautifully green. As the holidays approach, I find myself longing to be on Lebanon, but, as that is impossible, the next best thing will be to forward the little remembrances I am preparing for thee and thy loved ones. So look out for St. Nicholas, by the way of Silas Newman and the Overland. I often think of thee and thy grandparents. Wilt thou write me and tell me what thee would like best for thy Christmas. Ask thy grandfather if young Philip may put a sheaf of grain on a pole for the birds' holiday treat. My kindest regards to all on Mt. Lebanon, and kindly write to thy friend,

"Margaret Filmore,
"1105 Chestnut St.,
"Philadelphia, Pa."

"Now, Grandma, what do you think of my letter, and may I answer it?"

"Yes, Lyddy, yer letter is all right, child, an' ye kin answer it ef ye want to; but be keerful ye don't ask fer too much. Remember, ye hain't no claim on ther lady. But, arter 'Thanksgivin', ye kin write yer letter."

"Thank you, Grandma; I will do as you say."

She carefully folded and put away the letter, and

was soon humming her favorite hymn as she hastily went about setting the table for supper. As she passed her grandfather, he put his arm around her and said:

"Ye like yer old grandpa a bit, don't ye, Lyddy?"

That evening, after Philip and Lydia had gone to bed and everything was in order, Aunt Rhue drew her little splint bottom rocker nearer to the fire, and, reaching for the poker, deliberately drew the fallen brands together before the back log, put on a fresh fore stick, brushed the hearth, and settled back in her chair, while her knitting dropped unheeded to the floor. Then, she carefully smoothed out her gingham apron, and, picking up the hem, commenced folding and unfolding the pleats she made in a nervous manner.

The rain and sleet rattled against the windows, and the wind growled down the chimney. Uncle Nat laid aside the weekly paper and stretched his stockinged feet toward the fire. Then, he placed his hands behind his head and locking his fingers, said:

"Wall, Mother, it's a reg'lar nor'easter. I'm glad ther new fold fer ther Southdowns is finished, fer it's gittin' time fer good, snug weather."

"Yes, I know it is, Father, an' I'm glad ther fold is done; but do ye happen ter remember what time uv ther year it is?"

"Yer right, I do, Mother. I recollect exactly what happened ten years ago this time."

"Wall, Father, I'm mighty glad you do an' I'd like ter ask what ye think we'd better do erbout thet tarnal letter. Lyddy's gittin' mighty cur'us ter know erbout her parents an' ye can't blame ther

child. She's ten year old an' ye know ther time's drawin' nigh ter fulfill ther promise comin' New-year's Day. Ye well remember ther promise we made Robert's wife, don't ye?"

"Yes, I only too well remember an' I feel it in my bones thet it's er goin' erg'inst us ter read thet letter; but right is right, an' I ain't er goin' ter stand back when ther time comes. I've been thinkin'," Uncle Nat went on, running his fingers through his beard, "erbout this very thing, night an' day, fer some time, an' I jest wish we could pitch ther whole thing consarnin' our leetle girl inter ther fire an' see it go up in smoke. It nigh makes me crazy ter think uv what might come ter us if we foller ther directions in thet thar letter. Did ye ever think, Mother, erbout thet little woman all in gray an' so quietlike, thet wuz here last fall an' who wrote ther letter Lyddy got ter-night? Sometimes, I've thought maybe she hed er ax ter grind, pokin' around here an' visitin' ther graveyard an' sich."

"O, pshaw, Father, she wuz jest er traveler an' hed no notion er hankerin' arter any one on Lebanon; but, come ter think uv it, she did look mighty cur'us at Lyddy sometimes. But what is troublin' me is what air we goin' ter do 'bout thet letter?"

"Wall, Mother," and Uncle Nat straightened up, "we'll jest settle thet matter right now. When ther time comes, we'll take thet letter an' sit right down ez though Robert an' his pretty wife wuz here, an' we'll read ev'ry word, an' then, God helpin' us, we'll call Lyddy in an' both put our arms eroun' her an' read ev'ry word uv it ter her, let it be fur er ag'inst us. We're not goin' back on our word ter thet pore leetle dyin' mother, if ther whole

caboodle goes ter smash. No, siree, Lyddy's not goin' ter be cheated out uv one single word her mother writ. I have thought, Mother, ef things wuz ter come our way with ther mortgage paid off, an' ther income frum ther Granger farm an' thet air pension comin' in, we could do purty fair by Lyddy when ther time come. Ez fer ther schoolin', she could go ter Alderson fer er spell arter she wuz through at Alden Center, an', ef she wuz really sot on it, she could go ter college."

"Wall, Father, them air jest my own feelin's, an' I hev thought thet, by skimpin' er leetle here an' thar, we might manage ter git Lyddy er melodeon arter a while. She is jest sot on notes an' music, but not er might more than I wuz at her age. Tell yer, Father, this talk hez lifted er load of'n my mind, an' we'll bide by jest what ye've said. Lyddy'll hev her right, hit er miss. Ye'd better fix ther fire now, while I wind ther clock; an' bank it good, fer it'll be a snappy mornin' on Lebanon. Is everything ready fer ther hog-killin' ther day arter Thanksgivin'?"

"Yes, Mother, everything's ready. Jack an' Hank, ther Canucks thet helped with ther wood, will be on hand bright an' early. We'd better turn in; it's gettin' late," and he laid his hand on her shoulder and touched her forehead in loverlike fashion.

CHAPTER XV.

To the west of the farmhouse, a hill meadow lay high up the slope and afforded a far-off view of the distant snow-capped mountains.

The ice queen had cast a glittering coat of crystal on tree and shrub, and, during the night, her icy breath had completely covered everything. As Lydia stood before the window and brushed away the frost, her eyes looked out on a new world of fairylike beauty. The distant mountain-tops seemed to dip into the cold, clear, blue sky above and formed dark shadows where the sun failed to penetrate. Even the dark, jutting rocks and field-stone fences were bedecked with a crystal covering, and everything glistened and sparkled as if unseen hands had been busy during the long, cold night.

Lydia thoroughly enjoyed the magnificent winter scene spread before her, or she never would have tarried so long in the little, cold, frosty room to enjoy it. As she stood looking out, she said to herself:

"I wonder what is the matter with Grandpa and Grandma. They have scarcely smiled since Thanksgiving and seem so quietlike, but O, so kind and thoughtful to me. Only Philip and Rover and Tab seem the same. Everything seems so quiet and strange some way. I do wonder why it is, and, since Mr. St. Alban took dear Miss Lillian away, there seems to be no one who understands me. My, I must hurry and help Grandma with the breakfast and tidy up for her before I go to school. Poor, dear Grandma, she doesn't seem like herself, and I must help her all I can. Why, her hand trembled

so last night when she handed me the milk at supper-time, that it ran down the side of my porringer. But the sun is shining brightly, and that is a good omen, teacher says."

Dropping to her knees beside her little bed, she clasped her chilled hands and said: "Dear Jesus that knows everything, help me to understand better about dear Grandma and Grandpa and keep me well and strong so I can take care of them, for Thy sake. Amen."

Hastily rising and rubbing her cold fingers, she ran down-stairs and was soon busily engaged in the little duties so plentiful about a farm-kitchen. After breakfast, as her grandfather left the table, he laid his hand on Lydia's head and said:

"I think ye'd better stay home ter-day, Lyddy. Yer grandma'll be purty busy with ther extry Canucks ter cook fer, beside her ginerall housework ter do. I'm sorry ter bring extry work fer her, but ther addition to ther hay-barn must be finished an' those Canadians air so strong to help lift ther heavy timbers. I think we'll finish ter-day, at any rate."

"No, Father, Lyddy must go ter school with Philip ter-day. I want some tradin' done at ther store, an' Philip can't drive Bess an' steady thet 'ere baskit uv eggs, an' ther two rolls of butter air promised at ther parson's ter-day. Some circle is meetin' thar."

"Thank you, Grandma, but I'd rather stay and help you, if you need me. But isn't it a glorious morning? Everything is so beautiful. Just look at the trees, Grandma, and the lilac-bushes. They are covered with a crystal that looks like I imagine diamonds would in the sun."

"Yes, Lyddy, they air purty, but run erlong, child, an' be sure ye tie yer hood down snug an' pull yer mittens up good. Whar's yer tippet? Ye'll need it comin' up Lebanon way ter-night. Hadn't ye better tuck in an extry Northern Spy fer yer teacher?" and she handed her a noble specimen, polished to a ruby hue.

"O, Philip, isn't this a glorious morning?" exclaimed Lydia, as they drove down Alden way; "and doesn't old Phanton top away yonder, with its lights and shadows, look just like a sentinel placed there to guard the portals of heaven? You see, it is much taller than all the rest. Its head seems to completely overtop the others and then its white ermine mantle of snow makes it look as I said, just like a sentinel. Philip, just look over Baldy way. The soft clouds seem to flutter about it and sail away toward heaven. Oh! this glorious morning!"

"Say, Lyddy, do you know you scare me sometimes when you talk this way. I never heard any one talk so before except teacher and that fellow that was here last summer. Why, he even saw beauty in old rocks and stones to admire. I see the mountains and the sunshine and woods, but as for sentinels and mantles and such things, you have surely got me there."

"Why, Philip Strong, your sense of appreciation is sadly deficient. Cultivate it, cultivate it."

"There you go again, Lyddy, but I want to tell you, you're all right and I like you better than any girl in school."

Lydia looked up into Philip's face and, as she laid her mittened hand on his arm, she said: "Thank you, Philip; and I like you, too."

"Fly round, Lyddy, clar erway ther supper an tidy up, while I wash ther dishes; an', Philip, ye fill ther wood-box an' bring in er extry back stick, fer I must finish them mittens fer Si Newman's Christmas. That reminds me, Lyddy, Si brought in ernother letter fer yer ter-day, an' land only knows who could hev writ ter yer ergin; an' say, Lyddy, it's erbout ther proper time ter answer yer letter frum Philadelphia an' git it off ter-morrer."

"O, Grãndma! another real letter for me? May I just peep at the address and see my own name written in full on it?"

"Sure, child, ef it'll do yer any good. Did yer git ther raisins an' New Orleans. I've biled ther cider ter-day an' everything's ready fer ther Christmas mince meat, except ther lean meat frum ther pig's shoulder, an' yer grandpa'll git thet ready ther first thing ter-morrer morning."

"O, Grandma, it's from Denver, Colorado. Who do you think would write to me from there? But we will soon know. Please, Grandma, will you put in an extra gingersnap to-morrow for little Tim Markham. He told me to-day he didn't have gingersnaps any more since his mother died, so I gave him mine, and my apple, too."

"Yes, Lyddy, I'll put in an extry in yer lunch ter-morrer. Now, hurry, child, be spry. Your letter'll keep."

"Grandma, do you know when I see my whole name, Miss Lydia Wilbur, written in full, it makes me feel like a grown-up young lady."

Lydia laid the letter away and was soon happily engaged in putting things to rights, nor did she stop until the last indoor chore was finished, even to the

brushing of the hearth, and Aunt Rhue was seated in her rocker, with knitting in hand. Then, the little girl drew her stool near her grandmother and, seating herself, carefully scrutinized the address on the letter again. Borrowing a knitting-needle, she ran it through the end of the envelope and drew forth the letter.

"Greeting to all on Lebanon
and a hearty handshake:

"Dear Miss Lydia:

"I am off to-morrow for California. A merry Christmas to you all, and may Santa Claus by way of Si Newman and the Overland bring you everything you desire, from a box of paints to an eider-down robe. Say, Lydia, won't you paint me a spray of Vermont pine with the little brown cones on, like you used to bring in when returning from one of your woodland haunts. I have a friend who would like a drawing of the bee-hive out by your grandfather's grape-arbor, one with the busy little laborers humming around. You can touch it up with the water-colors that Santa will bring; for he is going to tuck in a little book for beginners in painting. My friend will pay liberally for such a picture as I have described. He will use it for a magazine illustration.

"I can see you all in my mind's eye, sitting before the fire-place with Uncle Nat's pitcher of cider near the hot coals to mull, and a dish of ruddy-cheeked Spys on Aunt Rhue's little candle-stand; and I can imagine the thud, thud of Philip's hammer as he cracks the walnuts for maple taffy. Be sure and save some for me.

"I can also hear the hum of the spinning-wheel

and see Aunt Rhue twisting the roll of carded wool as she steps backward and forward in drawing out the fine, crosbanded yarn. You remember she showed me how she did it when I was there, and I imagine Uncle Nat with his cards, making the soft fleecy rolls. How I wish I could be there for Christmas, for you know I have no home; but I must wait until spring for all my specimens are no doubt covered with snow, so I must hie away to a warmer climate.

"Hope you are all well and that Uncle Nat has entirely recovered. I hope the chair was of some use. A merry Christmas and a happy New-year.

"Your sincere friend,

"Philip Armstrong.

"P.S. Will write you when I am settled in California."

"There, Grandma, what do you think of that," said Lydia, as she laid the letter on the stand for Uncle Nat and Philip to read.

"Wall, Lyddy, I think he is er likely an' good young man, an' he don't belong to no common class either; an' ef he would ever stay long ernuf in one place, we would send him er leetle box frum Lebanon. He's what I call er sensible young man. Lyddy, ye'd better write ter thet woman in Philadelphy an' hev it done with. Ye'll find paper an' ink in yer grandpa's desk. Better light ernother candle."

After some time, Lydia came to her grandmother and read the letter she had written, her first real letter:

"Mrs. Filmore,

"Dear Madam:

"You asked me to tell you what I would like for

Christmas. I hardly know because I have so many nice things right here on Lebanon, but I would like a book and some colored pencils; but I would much rather you would send something to Grandpa and Grandma, and if it is not asking too much, just a little something for Philip, he is so kind. I asked him about putting up the sheaf of grain for the birds at Christmas time, and he said he would willingly do it. Grandpa says buckwheat is best.

"I think after all, the best way would be for you to send just what you think best. Never mind about the book or pencils for me. It was lovely of you to think of us, and we thank you kindly. Grandpa has finished making the sausage meat and a long row of pans in the pantry are full of white, glistening lard. He has also finished packing the side meat of Patsy and Pat, and their hams are smoking over a smudge of sweet corn-cobs. Grandpa says sweet corn-cobs are best.

"Grandma is busy with her mincemeat and other Christmas fixings. Philip is picking over the Northern Spys. He has finished the Rhode Island Greenings and Gilly Flowers.

"To-morrow is Sunday and, if it is fine, Philip and I are going to Sunday-school. I am knitting some wristlets for Grandpa and Philip for Christmas. Do you ever wear wristlets in the winter? Grandma spins every evening. I knit and Grandpa and Philip card the wool or work on the nicest splint baskets. I would like to see you again. We all send regards.

"Lydia Wilbur."

CHAPTER XVI.

It was the day before Christmas and everybody on Lebanon was busy. Philip had brought Lydia a fine little spruce tree and an armful of ground pine and barberry bush that he had gathered and carefully hidden away in the barn before the deep snow came. Even Aunt Rhue was enthused and had offered to help with the wreaths after everything else had been done about the house for the morrow. As usual, a large turkey gobbler was resting, all filled and trussed, within the great baking-pan, ready to slip into the oven for the Christmas dinner.

Little orphan Tim and sister Anna were invited as was also Si Newman, to partake of the Christmas dinner. Uncle Si was to bring the children from Alden way with him. Lydia had wreaths for every available place in the house and had even hung some on the sheep-fold, for she remarked that sheep played a remarkable part in the history of the birth of Him whose birth they were about to celebrate. "You know," she said, "shepherds were watching their flocks of sheep when they saw the star and there were sheep in the stable where the Savior was born."

Si Newman had brought two boxes, one from Philadelphia and one from Denver, Colorado, and for several days, Lydia and Philip were filled with curiosity and wonder over their contents. To-night, they were to be opened by Grandpa, after the chores were all done. Lydia could hardly wait. She had mysteriously smuggled the gold piece the Quakeress had given her, into Si Newman's possession with

instructions what to buy in Alderson. For her grandfather, there was to be a new pipe and a bundle of his favorite tobacco; for her grandmother, a little gray shawl of finest wool and a goodly package of her favorite Imperial Tea; for Philip, there must be a combination knife with screw-driver, file, and tweezers. Si Newman told her it was a piece of extravagance to think of such a knife, but Lydia would get it.

Christmas Eve came at last. The last job was completed and Uncle Nat was ready, with hatchet in hand, to open the wonderful boxes. He chose the one from Philadelphia first, and from its secret depths drew forth books and colored pencils in plenty. For Lydia, there came forth material for two new dresses of warm, fine merino, several pairs of mittens and gloves, a bright crimson eider-down hood with ribbons of same color that brought forth exclamations of delight from them all. There were warm leggins and a substantial waterproof for stormy days and various knickknacks that a young girl could use, the like of which Lydia had never seen before. A most beautiful chinchilla shawl and hood to match for Aunt Rhue made her very proud and thankful, and the "do tell," and "I declar'" from Uncle Nat, when the folds of a splendid chinchilla scarf were flaunted before him, and a pair of warm felt slippers with a "golden eagle" well wrapped in tissue paper and tucked snugly in the toe of one, was brought to sight, expressed his delight.

Philip was well remembered; but when a warm storm-coat came out of its wrappings, with a cap to match and a pair of gauntlet driving-gloves he, could not restrain himself, and, catching Lydia

whirled her round and round, both their eyes shining with happiness and delight.

From Colorado came books and paints, drawing-paper and pencils, a handsome writing-desk of polished cherry, with the initials, "L. W.," inlaid with silver, well stocked with every requisite. Also, for Lydia, was a pair of light-weight rubber boots, lambswool-lined, and for Philip the same, only more strongly made; for Uncle Nat there was a wonderful carved pipe; and for Aunt Rhue came a most beautiful leather-bound Bible, with her name in gold on the cover. The little Markhams were substantially remembered, so was Si Newman, who cried: "I'll be goldarned, Lyddy, ye air all right," as she slipped a pair of gay wristlets over his hardened, knotty hands. He gave her a little book of fairy tales. For thanks, she said:

"Uncle Si, may I give you just a Christmas kiss?"

This made his heart warm and a lump raise in his throat.

"This is er leetle too much ter spring on er feller unawares," he said, wiping his eyes.

Lydia, on going to bed Christmas night, tired but very happy, flung her arms around her grandmother and said: "Grandma, this has been the happiest day of my life." As she released her arms, Aunt Rhue drew her hand slowly from her bosom and placed in Lydia's hand a tiny package tied with a faded ribbon, and said: "Open it, Lyddy."

"Oh, oh!" Lydia exclaimed, as she drew forth a small gold locket and chain. "Oh, Grandma, where did you get it? How beautiful it is!"

Aunt Rhue took it in her hands, tremblingly opened it, pointed to its contents, and said: "There,

Lyddy, is the likeness uv yer own mother an' father, an' I guess this will end our Christmas. Now, don't ask any questions till arter New-year's. I'spose I oughter hev kept it till then, but I reckon it'll do yer ez much good now ez ever."

"O, Grandma," cried Lydia, almost faint with joy, and with tears of gladness in her eyes. "O, you dearest of all grandmas! Of all the presents I ever had, this is the very best. It is almost too good to be true, and I don't believe the wise men who found the precious infant, Jesus, in the manger, could have been any happier than I. I will just put it under my pillow, and it will be the next thing to having a really truly father and mother. Thank you again and again for this precious gift."

Uncle Nat took off his spectacles and wiped them, and a tear stole down Aunt Rhue's cheek. She laid her hand on Lydia's head as she kissed her and said: "Better run erlong ter bed, Lyddy. Yer candle's sputterin' now. Don't git up till I call ye termorrer mornin'."

Lydia stopped to give Uncle Nat a kiss and hug and said: "Grandpa, did you know Grandma had this surprise for me?"

"Yes, yes, Lyddy, I did; but you're tired an' better run erlong ter bed. It's gittin' purty late."

CHAPTER XVII.

New-year's day dawned clear and bright on Lebanon. Every one was astir as usual. The children had gone to school, chores all done, the kitchen was in perfect order, and Uncle Nat was reading the Weekly Chronicle. Tremblingly, Aunt Rhue approached him and, laying her hand on his shoulder, said:

"Father, you know what day this is. Shall we read that letter?"

"Might ez well, Mother," he replied.

She drew from her pocket the letter her son's wife had given her ten years ago, and handed it to him. He drew a chair near him and said:

"Sit down, Mother, right here by me an' we will tackle this business at once an' hev it off our minds."

He took off his glasses slowly, polished and readjusted them, cleared his throat, and opened the letter. Everything was painfully quiet. The only sound was the loud purring of old Tabby, lazily stretched out before the fire. With a quiver in his voice, Uncle Nat began to read:

"To Robert's mother and father, and when read please send to the address you will find at the close of this letter.

"The Doctor says I can never be well, and I feel eternity drawing and before it is too late, I must pen the history of the last two years to clear the future of my precious babe and my own good name. You, as well as my own mother, will remember the terrible ravages the late war made, and how thousands of young men and old, good and bad, were wounded and killed. Mother will also remember

the hundreds who were rushed in to dear old Washington where hastily improvised hospitals were prepared and soon filled, and of the hurried call for volunteer nurses, and of how I begged and pleaded to go to one of them and do what I could to help alleviate suffering humanity.

"Finally, on a hot, sultry day, when a new batch of wounded Union soldiers was rushed in, a most imperative call was made for nurses. My mother at last consented for me to go, but under the watchful care of our family physician, old Doctor Wilsey. Never shall I forget the sight as I entered the barren hall they called hospital. I was delegated at once as a night-nurse and went the rounds with the doctor. He quietly gave the necessary directions for each patient, then left me with two other nurses to get through the night as best we could.

"Oh! the harrowing, sickening experience of that night; the horrible oaths, the pitiful moans, the earnest prayers, all mingled, of those wounded men. Some had lost a leg, some a foot or an arm, many severely and others fatally wounded. In my ward were two soldiers, one cursing the fate that brought him to the war, the other bemoaning the necessity that laid him aside. In his delirium, he was a child at his mother's knee, with his little sister, Emily, saying their 'Now I lay me down to sleep.' Again, he was doing chores on the dear old Vermont farm; then, conversing with his mother, and at another time, he was hoisting the stars and stripes.

"The suffering, the sorrow, the grief within those walls, and there was so much to do: bandages to roll, lint to scrape, pillows to smooth, letters to read, letters to write, confidences to hear, hearts to cheer,

eyes to close as the last roll call taps were sounded. Well, as one of my patients, Robert Wilbur, gradually gained in strength, he was anxious to get back to his place in the firing line. He was no coward."

At this, Uncle Nat dropped the letter and clasped his hands. "Thank God, he was no coward," he murmured.

"Doctor Wilsey forbade him even to think of it. His convalescence was slow and we were thrown much together. There was another young soldier, St. Alban, by name, and he, with my chum, Lillian St. Clair, formed a pleasant circle. We were as supremely happy as young lovers could be. Finally, I told my mother of Robert's love and asked that he might come home with me sometimes. She was very angry and forbade him the house, and also said that I must give him up. But Robert and I spent much time together and when the call came for Robert and St. Alban to go, we separated as betrothed lovers and would be married at the close of the war. I told my mother all. She said I would be no child of hers if I did, that she would disinherit and disown me, that I must give up the soldier adventurer, that she had other plans for me. I said nothing but settled down to my regular hospital work quietly and bided my time."

"God love her," said Aunt Rhue.

"One dark, rainy night about six months later, a servant brought me a note and said a messenger was waiting for a reply. It was from Robert. He wrote that he and St. Alban were off for the far South the next day to engage in heavy fighting. They could not leave without seeing us. Their regiment was all ready and they had walked and

ridden horseback twenty-five miles to see us before they left for battle; and asked that Lillian and I would meet them for a last good-by. Hastily writing that we would be there, we despatched the answer by the messenger. Fortunately, it was my night off and nothing to hinder me. I went at once to my chum and she made arrangements to get off for a few hours. I put a rainy-day skirt over my uniform, a long water-proof cloak, little close hat, and thick veil, and was soon on my way to meet Robert.

"When I reached the place, which was not far, Lillian was there, and we at once proceeded to plan a walk that we might visit and talk over our future plans. We started out Georgetown Road, as being the most pleasant and quiet. I will not go into details, but the happiest hours of my life were spent that dark rainy night. Well, the culmination of that trip was that, at ten o'clock that night, we were married at a Baptist parsonage, by the Rev. R. Thompson, of the First Baptist Church, and witnessed by his wife and maid. After the ceremony, we were a bit frightened and hardly knew what to do. Robert had slipped a thin gold ring from his finger for our marriage-tie. After a hurried walk back toward the hospital, the young men going as near as we thought safe, we said our last good-by and pledged eternal love and loyalty to each other. Then, we separated, the soldiers to face a coming battle, and we girls to live as best we could, with the sweet secret of that night buried deep in our hearts. I had only the little locket with Robert's dear face and the few marriage-lines as proof of his love.

"Months passed without a word except what we could learn from the scanty newspaper report of their regiment. One day, a young lad of perhaps fifteen years, begrimed with sweat and dirt, rode up to the hospital, hastily dismounted, and, coming up the steps, asked the servant: 'Is Miss Margaret Filmore here?' He was brought immediately to me. Touching his old straw hat, he handed me a letter. How my heart bounded! It was from Robert, and read:

" 'I am at Vicksburg, Va. Can you come to me?'

"I did not know what to do. My mother was at White Sulphur Springs with her maid and my aunt, and I was going to join them the next week for a few days' vacation. I had remained to look after the repairs being made on our home. I hastily wrote a note, saying I would go at once, and gave it to the boy, who told me the hospital there was filled with soldiers who had been brought in badly wounded in the last battle. I was frightened. I then sought Doctor Wilsey and asked for a few days' absence, rushed home, and, calling the old colored housekeeper, said: 'Chloe, I am called out of town for a couple of days. Can you stay here and look after everything? You may bring your mother to stay with you.' She replied: 'Yas'm, Miss Margaret, I can stay, deed I can, honey.' I told her to pack my bag with the necessary articles for a two days' trip and not to leave the house an hour until my return.

"At three o'clock, I was on my way, and in due time was with my precious husband, for whom I had given up so much. He had by this time been given some new title of which I, of course, knew

nothing until I was introduced by some of his friends as Colonel Wilbur's wife. For three days, we basked in the sunshine of happiness of our love; then his regiment marched away, and I returned to Washington. O, the bliss of perfect love; the happiness of being Robert's wife!

"Months passed with only occasional news of my husband. His regiment was sent from one point to another; heavy fighting was going on everywhere. The limited press news was all I had. At last, came the news of 'The battle of the Wilderness,' in May, 1864, and the disastrous result. Among the names was that of Col. Robert Wilbur."

Here, Aunt Rhue's hand went to her eyes as she said: "Pore lamb! God love her."

"God knows the shock was terrible, both of my own condition and the uncertainty of my husband's. I went at once to dear old Doctor Wilsey and told him the truth from the beginning. He shook his head and said: 'Poor child; poor child! You must tell your mother.'

"At last, I summoned up courage to tell Mother. Her anger was terrible to witness. She told me to leave the house; that I was no child of hers. I tried to explain, but she would not listen; she said I had disgraced her, and many other things too terrible to write. I did not know what to do. My heart was breaking. I was an only child. My father died when I was very young. I had an annuity from Grandmother Filmore's estate and a small fortune when I should reach my twenty-fifth year. I went sadly up-stairs, anxiously waiting for the evening paper. Chloe brought it and lighted the candle. After she left, I locked the door and trem-

blingly perused the paper. I quickly turned to the column of dead and wounded. Almost the first name among the dead was Col. Robert Wilbur."

"My God!" groaned Uncle Nat.

"Pore child!" and Aunt Rhue wept.

"How can I write the experience of that terrible night! Alone in the world, husband dead, alienated from a mother's love and home, and the flutter of the little soul beneath my heart told of the trying experience I had to face. I arose, stunned and heart-broken, went to my table, reached for my portfolio and wrote a note to my mother, telling her the name of the minister who married us, with street and number, hurriedly packed a traveling-bag, gathered together all the available cash I had. Then, I sat down, opened the little gold locket, and gazed at all that was left in the world for me to love. Oh, my God! the agony of that moment.

"I knew no more until nearly morning. When I came to myself, the candle had burned to its socket. The grim, gray dawn was beginning to show through a drizzling rain. I hastily arose, put on the hat, veil, and waterproof I had worn the night I was married. I reread and put carefully in my purse my marriage-certificate. Then, with a prayer for guidance, quietly stole from my mother's house, quivering with dismay, and left my home forever, the home of my childhood. With trembling feet, I directed my steps to the railway station, purchased a ticket, then waited for the train that would carry me to Richmond and to my husband's dead body. No trace did I leave of my destination.

"It was a long, tiresome journey with only my sad thoughts for company. It seemed we barely

crept along. It was a slow accommodation-train at best and stopped, it seemed, at every crossroad. My temples were throbbing violently; the rain dashed against the windows. The car was filled with men, women, and children of the common class, but it mattered not to me; I was on my way to Robert.

"If I could only reach Richmond before they sent his body home; then I could go with it. I felt that Robert's father and mother, after they had seen the marriage-lines and the little gold locket with their boy's face, would let me stay with them, at least, until I was able to work."

"The pore dear!" groaned Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue.

"All at once, there was a shock. The train came to a standstill. A crash, then the shrieks of injured people. Then all was still and dark. The next I knew, I was in bed with a sweet-faced, motherly-looking woman bending over me. 'Where am I?' I asked. She put her finger to her lips and said, 'Thank God!' Then, passing through a door, quickly returned with a cup and, putting it to my lips, bade me drink, saying: 'This will make you better. Now you must rest.' I soon dozed off again.

"Presently, the sound of subdued voices reached me. One said: 'Mrs. Brown, she will live I think. Keep her quiet, but answer all questions as soon as you think she can bear it. It will relieve her mind to know even the worst at once.' I must have dozed off again, for, when I opened my eyes, it was twilight and a dim shadow sat near the window, that arose at hearing my moan and came quickly to

my bedside. I raised or tried to and said: 'Will you please tell me where I am?'

" 'You are with friends,' she replied, 'about two miles from Richmond, at an humble farmhouse of which I am mistress. You have been here over two weeks. The train you were on was wrecked but a short distance from here, scarce half a mile, and you, with a number of others, were brought here. The rest have all gone.'

" 'Two weeks!' I moaned, 'and my husband, they have taken him home, and he is buried long ere this.'

" 'What should I do. In attempting to move, I found one ankle was stiff. I was unable to move it, and she informed me it was broken but was doing nicely and that I would soon be around again, and that I had had brain-fever and had been very sick.

" 'The next day, she informed me that she was all alone on the little farm, with the exception of two old slaves, an old negro and his wife. I grew better day by day, and, when the time came that my ankle was healed, I felt I must leave and so told my hostess. She asked: 'Where is your home?' Then, I broke down and told her I had none. I gave her a true statement of my case. She arose from her chair and came quickly to my side, and said: 'I am a Southern woman and you a Union soldier's widow. I know not how soon I may be bereft of my husband. You shall stay here and share my humble fare until your trouble is over and you are able to travel.'

" 'I stayed on until my precious baby came, but God alone knows what I suffered in mind as well

as body. Alone in the world, no one to protect me, but there was my baby — Robert's and my precious baby that I nearly gave my life for. My constant prayer was: 'Dear God, help me reach Robert's home.'

"One bright morning, I brought down my purse and emptying its contents in Mrs. Brown's lap, said: 'There is all I have that is available. Take it all except just enough to buy me a ticket to Bolton, Vermont, and my expenses to Alden Center by stage.' Robert had given me the directions to reach his home, never thinking from what grave necessity I would try to reach you. 'In another year, I shall have come into an inheritance that will permit me to repay you for all your kindness to me.' With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said: 'Not one cent will I take. You will need every penny.' The next day, Rastus hitched an old mule to a cart and took me and my baby to Richmond, but before I left, I wrote a note, and with it, left fifty dollars.

"From Richmond, I came on to Bolton; tomorrow, I will take stage for Alderson, change and then go on to Lebanon, near Alden Center.

"It has taken a long time to write this, and I am oh! so tired, but I dared put it off no longer. I had the doctor last night, and he forbade my going on any farther, but I must try for my baby's sake and, in case anything happened, I wanted you to know the truth. If I die, take good care of Margaret Lydia. When I am dead, you will know the whole truth, the truth my lips will refuse to tell, and forgive us both. We meant no harm. The precious locket and the few bits of jewelry that I

bought with my own money (I refused to bring the rest) I give to Lydia. If I live, I will destroy this and give them to her myself, If I die, when she is old enough, give them to her, and take legal steps to secure my inheritance for her. It is all invested in good securities. I enclose the necessary papers with this.

"When you have read this, send it to my mother — the mother who wronged me so terribly; but I forgive her as I hope God will, for driving her only child out into the world to suffer. If I die and Lydia lives, always watch over her carefully. I appoint you her guardian. If she loves the country, keep her. She will have enough of her own to educate and start her in life.

"I leave Bolton to-morrow to try to find Robert's father and mother, the parents he loved so well, and the ones I shall love for his sake. God grant I may reach them safely and with my own hands, place my precious babe in their arms, the arms that held Robert."

As Uncle Nat finished, he slowly folded and returned the letter to its envelope, wiped his eyes and face with his bandana, then laid his hand on Aunt Rhue's shoulders.

"Wall, Mother, what do ye think uv thet?"

"Father, I think so much thet I don't know really whar ter commence ter talk erbout it. But first, I think Lyddy's mother was er good woman, an' it nigh kills me ter think she hed ter suffer so much through our boy an', God helpin' me, her child shall be treated right. Pore girl! Ez fer her mother, wall, I won't say jest what I think, fer I believe God will take care uv her punishment all right."

"Yes, I guess her soul hez been tortured some, hankerin' arter ther wharabouts uv her only child. The Lord knows erbout when ter 'ply ther punishment better'n we do. Bit it haint' so bad fer us, Mother, ez I feared. Now, what shall we tell Lyddy?"

"Wall, Father, I've be'n thinkin' what's ther use ter harrer up her leetle soul with all this sufferin' uv her pore mother. It'll do her no good."

"I move," said Uncle Nat, "we send this letter right whar it belongs. It'll do its work better'n we cud. It orter pierce thet 'ere woman's soul like er barbed arrer. Then you kin sit down, comin' Sunday, an' tell Lyddy erbout her father an' mother an' grandma somewhere. Show her her leetle baby clothes an' give her her mother's marriage-lines an' all ther things thet she wanted her ter hev."

"But, Father, don't ye think Lyddy's ruther young ter hev sich valuable things?"

"No, Mother, I don't. Lyddy's thet sensible-like, she'd cherish 'em an' take tarnal good care uv 'um. I say give 'em ter ther child an' done with it, an', the next time I go Bolton way, I'll git er nice leetle trunk with lock an' key fer her ter keep her treasures in. I say give her ev'ry dum thing thet belongs ter her. She's a prime child an' no mistake, an' shall be cheated no longer erbout her parents; but I say, Mother, I wouldn't tell her erbout her new grandma's cussed actions towards her mother."

"Why, Nathaniel Wilbur, stop yer swearin'. Thet'll do no good."

"Wall, Mother, good er not, it'll help relieve my feelin's some, I reckon. Now, I'm goin' ter ther barn ter look arter ther stock."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Friday, January 3d, 1873, was a cold, crisp morning on Lebanon. The children had gone to school and Aunt Rhue had just finished frying a batch of doughnuts and was sifting some newly shaved maple sugar over them, "to give 'um a flavor," she said.

Uncle Nat was washing his hands at the dry sink, having just come in from the barn. "I guess I'd better write thet tarnal letter this mornin', though I hate ter like pizen," he said, as he dried his hands.

"Yes, Father, I think you'd better, but do yer know I've been thinkin' uv the name of Lyddy's new grandmother, an' I declar' to goodness ef it hain't the same ez the leetle Quaker woman thet wuz here last fall. But she lives in Philadelphia."

"Never mind, Mother, we'll solve the mystery afore long ef pen an' ink'll do it."

Uncle Nat drew his chair a little nearer the old secretary, gave his collar a hitch upward, and ran his bony fingers repeatedly through his grizzled hair and beard, then lifted a goose-quill and dipped it in the ink-horn.

"By hookey," he murmured to himself, "ef this hain't the hardest job I ever tackled except the letter I read day before yisterday. By gad ——" and he looked around to see if Aunt Rhue heard him — "I've er good notion not ter write this 'ere letter. I know what it'll mean ter us. It jest means thet we'll lose Lyddy by the proceedin'. I jest wish whoever her other grandmother is, thet she's passed over the great divide long ergo. See here, Nat Wilbur," he went on, "there's the finger

on ther wall; don't flunk an' show ther white feather. Jest call ter mem'ry ther promise ye made thet dyin' gal, an' go on with thet writin', let it be fer er ergin yer."

For a long time, the scratch of his pen was audible; then, laying it aside, he drew forth his bandana, mopped his damp forehead, dried his spectacles. Calling to Aunt Rhue, who was busy in the kitchen, to come in, he picked up the sheet of paper and, as she came into the room, said:

"Set down, Mother. Ther thing's writ an' I want ye should hear its contents before I send it ter Washington."

"Lebanon, Vermont, Jan. 23, 1873.

"Dear Madam:

"I am enclosing a letter, put in hand ten year and over ago, by your dying daughter. The child is well and happy here on Lebanon with its own grandparents. I would suggest that she be left here for another year or two. She is a leetle mite and I don't know what it might mean to transplant her, even for a visit to city life. You can come and see her this spring if you like, but I don't want her disturbed this winter. She's going to school regular and is well and happy. If anything should happen to necessitate your presence, I'll surely let you know at once.

"Respectfully yours,

"Nathaniel Wilbur."

Aunt Rhue wiped her glasses and said: "Now, see here, Father, don't yer think yer letter is er leetle bit stiff — kinder sharplike? Ye must remember this 'ere woman, whoever she is, is Lyddy's

own grandmother an' fer all we know, is jest hungerin' fer her own. Better add er P. S. an' tell her ter write at once ef she gits ther letter an' let us know what is her pleasure. Course, she can't take her less we say, specially ef Lyddy wants ter stay. Wise leetle mother, Robert's wife wuz. But, Father, what air we goin' ter do when ther time comes ter part with Lyddy?"

"Tut, tut, Mother. Lyddy hain't gone yit an' ef ther time ever comes she does, ye will allus hev ther consolation uv knowin' ye hev hed ther privilege uv steerin' her craft fer ten year an' more, an' I cal'late ther foundation uv her future is purty well shaped; so don't worry ner cross any bridges till ye come to 'um. I'll jest seal this letter an' pass it ter Si ez he goes by in ther mornin'. Ye see, Mother, what right hev we to hold ourselves up ez ideals uv er high standard uv life, ef we don't practise what we preach? Here we air, fussin' over Lyddy's future an' our partin' an' sich. We've no right ter try ter scale thet wall. Ye know we've took this purty hard, but we'll take er fresh start an' live fer somethin' thet'll satisfy in ther end — somethin' thet'll satisfy our souls ez well ez our hearts, thet'll turn our failures an' misgivin's an' doubts inter good. In ther future, we'll jest trust, Mother, jest trust. We want ter stand fer true livin' ev'ry time an' Lyddy'll come out all right, ef we do our part. I, fer one, feel downright streaked fer showin' ther white feather."

"Uv course, we'll stand fer true livin' every time, Father, uv course, we will. I'll hurry now with ther dinner. Jake'll be here 'fore it's ready."

Uncle Nat laid his hands on either side of Aunt

Rhue's head and smoothed her hair down each side, saying: "Queen Victory ain't in it with you, Mother, an' I count her 'bout ther best woman in ther world."

"Now, go long, Father"; but a rosy hue overspread her pleased face. As he went out, she said to Tabby, "Ther best man in ther world."

The next day, the letter was forwarded to the address given in Washington, and Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue felt a great load lifted from their hearts. They felt years younger, and Aunt Rhue even hummed a tune of an old hymn as she stepped about her work.

Sunday was blustering and cold on Lebanon. No Sunday-school or church that day. After dinner was cleared away, Aunt Rhue brought out a bake-kettle and iron cover; then, drawing some hot coals from the fire-place, she placed the kettle on them.

"What are you going to do, Grandma?"

"Wall, Lyddy, I thought maybe you'd like er leetle popcorn; Philip shelled it fer me last night." As she spoke, she stooped and put in the corn and replaced the cover. Almost before she moved from the hearth, it began to crackle and sputter against the cover, and when Aunt Rhue drew the kettle from the hot coals and raised the cover, there was a bed of fluffy whiteness.

"Better melt some maple, Lyddy, an' we'll hev some corn-balls."

"Thank you, Grandma. How kind you are to bother for me. You need every minute's rest you can get."

When Uncle Nat and Philip went to the barn to do the chores, Aunt Rhue drew her rocker near the

fire, placed Lyddy's little stool by her side, and, when she had sat down, put her arm lovingly around her little grandchild and told her all. Told her of her father's boyhood; then of the gentle, loving mother, eliminating every unkind act of her Grandmother Filmore. Told her about her mother's coming, in a gentle, soothing way, smoothing out all rough places, but said not a word of the future. Told her how she would find on her little bed some remembrances of her mother's.

As she finished, Lydia arose and said, as she threw her little thin arms around her grandmother's neck: "Grandma, you are the dearest and best in all the world, and I love you with all my heart. You will always come first." Then, she straightened up and said, with a sad, wee smile: "Now Grandma, we can talk sometimes about my parents, can't we?"

"Yes, Lyddy, ye may," as she kissed her. "Ye air a good child. Don't fergit ter read yer Bible. 'Make of Christ not only a redeemer but a friend,' an' remember, Lyddy, ter stand firm where God's providence hez set yer feet an' ye'll be secure. Make His righteousness yer shield. Labor fer God is ther best cure fer sorrow an' disappointment, but I sure hope ye'll hev neither fer years to come."

In due time, the letter reached Mrs. Filmore, having been forwarded from Washington. After reading her other mail, she slowly studied the postmark, Alderson, and as slowly opened and drew forth Uncle Nat's letter. She had felt some premonition, having remembered Aunt Rhue's story and felt no surprise. Slowly, she read the letter,

studying every word without the twitching of a muscle. Having finished, she folded her hands and said:

"Well, it has turned out just as I expected, and I am glad it is no worse. They are worthy people and mean well, but my grandchild must be reared according to the station she will occupy in future life. With the proper training and education, she will eventually develop into a beautiful young woman. I discovered great possibilities even when I was there. I am grateful for her modest, quiet, and dignified ways. Blood will tell. She has inherited them from me, for which I am thankful. Those old people are not suitable companions for my granddaughter. I will go to them at once and relieve them of the great responsibility. Of course, I will compensate them for their trouble, but my grandchild must be reared in an entirely different atmosphere. I will write at once and tell them that, as soon as the weather will permit, I will come for her," and, drawing her writing-material to her, she proceeded to answer Uncle Nat's letter.

In due time, Mrs. Filmore received an answer to the effect that she had better reread the previous letters sent her, that her grandparents on Lebanon had succeeded in raising her so far and, by God's help, would continue to do so for a few years. Then, if Lydia wanted to go to Philadelphia, she could do so and that this plan was final; but that, should she desire at any time to visit Lydia, the home on Lebanon would always be open to her. Occasional letters passed between them. In the early summer, Mrs. Filmore went to Lebanon, and after much discussion, it was finally decided that

Lydia should remain undisturbed until she was fourteen years old.

Time had made rapid progress, and we find Mrs. Filmore on Lebanon making plans for Lydia to go to Philadelphia the coming fall. After much discussion, Aunt Rhue wound up by saying:

"When it comes ter havin' Lyddy leave, it erbout strikes me dumb; but, understand, I'd ruther see Lyddy happy than anything in ther world, an' ez she is sot on education, I want her ter hev it. But you must never fergit she is blood uv my blood, an' flesh uv my flesh. I can't say ez I relish hevin' her livin' in er city an' er copyin' ther ways. It jest makes my blood boil ter see them fashion-pictures uv wimmin er wearin' only ther lower half uv er waist, an' arms all bare clean ter ther shoulder. Lots uv these doin' they call pleasure, ma'am, is only breedin' misery fer ther future.

"I know Lyddy's young an' small all right, an' I want ter see her take her rightful place in ther world, but it's tough ter lose her. I've hed my day nigh erbout, but ther remainin' years I'm willin' ter bide by God's direction; but it's hard ter wear er smilin' face when yer heart's like ter break, an' I want ter tell yer it's been thet way many er time, when I've allowed myself ter tink uv thet child's future, an' I've wondered what she'd do when Father an' I were done with this life. But ez hard ez it is fer me ter think uv partin' with ther child, it's a comfortin' thing ter know thet ye air ther woman ter look arter Lyddy's future."

"But, Sister Wilbur, thee is not going to lose Lydia. She will ever be thy grandchild as now and shall come to thee and thy good husband every sum-

mer, and thee must come to Philadelphia and see thy grandchild's home."

"Talk is cheap, ma'am; but ther thing thet's puzzlin' me is how Father is goin' ter git erlong without Lyddy."

Slowly, Lydia crossed the back dooryard. Tabby, walking by her side, seemed to know there was something unusual in Lydia's not noticing her, and would occasionally rub her arched back against Lydia's ankles to attract her attention.

The shepherd dog, Rover, arose and came toward her from the open barn-door, but Lydia went straight on in and found Philip busily mending a rabbit-trap. "Oh, Philip! I've come to say good-by." He glanced up, startled, pushed back his cap, and said:

"To say good-by?"

Lydia, dropping her head, said: "Yes, Philip, good-by."

"Are you clean gone out of your senses, Lydia? Do you really mean that you are going to leave Lebanon, and Aunt Rhue and Uncle Nat and Bess and the lambs and Rover and me?"

"Yes," she assured him slowly, "but Grandma will tell you all about it. Please do not ask me about it now."

"Are you going away soon?"

"Yes, this fall I am going to Philadelphia to school. Are you sorry, Philip?" she asked, looking him full in the face.

He only replied: "Must you really go, Lydia?"

"Yes, but let us talk about something else. It seems as though I can not stand it. It is more

than I can bear, but I am coming back next summer."

"I am sorry," Philip said, but went on with his work.

What the trial was to Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue, no one knew. All through the cold, bleak winter that practically made shut-ins of them, they went along the daily routine as of old, with no news of the outside world except what Jake and Uncle Nat would bring in from the crossroads or from Alden Center where one or the other went each week to exchange the eggs and butter for the family supply of groceries. But the most momentous event and one that warmed their kind and loving old hearts was when Si Newman would bring the weekly letter from Lydia. They were long, well written, and to them quite marvelous. They were kept in touch with her home life, her school, her sight-seeing, and they could easily discern her great desire for more knowledge.

Mrs. Filmore provided them with a Philadelphia weekly paper and a monthly magazine, which they enjoyed, but these did not fill the void in their aching hearts. Philip was not forgotten. Lydia always tucked in a little letter for him, inquiring about her school-mates and the animals on the farm, and Philip always answered them, and according to promise, Lydia always spent each summer on the farm.

CHAPTER XIX.

Three years have now passed, and Lydia was making preparations to visit the farm for the last time before graduation. She had asked her grandmother that she might be allowed to make the journey to Lebanon alone that year, but Mrs. Filmore firmly refused. If there were no friends going Bolton way, she herself must go. Finally, some friends traveling that way promised to care for Lydia, and, at Bolton, see her on the train for Alderson, from which place she would go safely in Si Newman's care by way of the Overland. But, after all her planning, her home-coming was something of a disappointment. Uncle Nat, thinking to give her a genuine surprise, planned to meet her in Alderson himself, as he had business there, and then he and Lydia could have a good long visit on the ten-mile trip home. He dusted out the family carryall and placed two easy splint bottom chairs in place of the seat, that Lydia might ride all the more comfortably.

As Lydia stepped from the cars and saw the carryall, she grew hot with embarrassment, seeing her fellow passengers eyeing the equipage, and she almost wished her grandfather had not come. But, in a moment, a flash of shame crossed her countenance and rushing up to her grandfather, she threw her arms around his neck, and hugged and kissed him regardless of onlookers.

The road, much of the way over which they jolted, was rutty, and old Bess stopped often to rest. There were many questions to ask about her grandmother, also Philip, who had left the farm that

spring and gone to Bolton to live. She wanted to know all about the lambs and other animals and even the bees came in for their share of interest.

As they jogged along, she could not help but notice the ungainly fences and untidy, unkept houses. Nothing was trimmed and well-kept like she was used to seeing in Philadelphia, and even her own home, when they reached it, did not seem like her recollection of it. She was delighted to see her grandmother, whom she loved dearly, but she could not help but notice the difference between the lavender sprigged calico and the dainty soft wool and silk dresses her city grandmother wore, and her hair was combed tightly back from her temples, instead of falling lightly beside her face. Even the furniture looked commonplace and scant. Lydia felt ashamed that she could notice those things, but in reality they dampened her spirits, and then she missed Philip.

She despised herself for seeing the coffee-pot was tin and the handles of the knives and forks bone, but above all that, they poured their tea and coffee into the saucers to cool before drinking it.

Although her grandmother had provided a delicious supper, it annoyed her to see it all put on the table at once. She knew it was ungrateful and wicked to let such trifles disturb her happiness the first evening at home. There was so much to talk of, so much to tell, so many questions to ask, and so many questions to answer; and, let it be said to her credit, her pillow was dampened that night and the more she reproved her self for her ingratitude and fickleness, the more plentiful the tears.

Things were more desirable in the morning. Put-

ing on a neat print dress and saying her prayers with a trembling voice, she tripped happily down the stairs as of yore and in a trice was busily helping with the breakfast. This over, she was out in the open, filling her lungs with the fresh sweet air.

"I must have been tired last night, for I didn't feel a bit like myself. How dear and beautiful everything looks. There is nothing like the country after all."

The clover fields were aflush with nodding blooms. A thousand bees and insects of every kind sipped the sweet nectar as they busily hummed above them. The cornfields shook their glossy blades and tasseled tops in the face of the glowing sun. The near-by trees seemed alive with redbreasts and blue wings, and along the top rail of the old worm fence, the striped ground squirrels ran a race. Everything seemed bidding her welcome.

She told her grandparents of her Grandmother Filmore's teaching of goodness and wisdom, of the new friends she had made, of her classes at school, and of the prizes on examination-day.

"Just think, Grandma, when I was young and foolish, I used to think and dream of just such things as have come to pass; but I never have forgotten that you and Grandpa gave me my first start, and I long to be a credit to you; and, when I am through school, I am coming back to dear old Lebanon and live forever."

"La, child, ther idee uv ye talkin' erbout bein' young an' foolish. Why, ye air only turned seventeen, an' don't know what life is; but I'm proper glad ye air not so citified but thet ye still love us on Lebanon."

At these tender words, the false pride of yesterday was recalled and brought a blush to her fair young face.

"I am going to the north woods this afternoon, Grandma. I want once more to see those dear old hickory and maple trees lock arms, and look for the late wild violets in the hollow."

So the summer passed in happy enjoyment. Philip came for a short vacation, and they tramped over familiar ground, gathering the berries and helping hull them. The time passed all too quickly, and Lydia was back in Philadelphia, busy with her last year's study.

CHAPTER XX.

"Hello, Aunt Rhue," called a cherry voice, "where are you? I haven't but a minute to spare; so show up before I make myself scarce."

"Why, Philip Strong, I didn't know ye. Ye hev growed so big an' likely. Where under canopy hev ye bin an' where air ye goin' in sech a hurry," and Aunt Rhue pushed back her sunbonnet and sponged off her forehead with a corner of her apron. "I was cullin' out ther dead leaves from this strawberry-patch an' gittin' ready fer Father to rake over ther lettuce an' onion-beds. Time seed wuz in days ergo, but ther hard rains hev hindered all sich plantin' an' put back everything but ther grass an' grain. Father said last night we'd never hed sech likely winter wheat an' rye. Big crop ef nothin'

happens. But, Philip, loose yer hoss's bridle an' come in an' set erwhile."

"Thank you, Aunt Rhue, but I only stopped for a few minutes to see how you and Uncle Nat were and to inquire about Lydia."

"Well, Philip, I'm proper glad ye did. Father's well. He an' Jake air over in the west timber-lot. I s'pose ye know he is sot on buildin' er new house. Ez fer Lyddy, she is well. I s'pose ye know she will be graduatin' this spring!"

"No, I have not heard so, but I suspected as much. Lydia is a very intellectual and bright girl, Aunt Rhue. Do you think she will be on Lebanon this summer?"

"Wall, Philip, she says she will, but I don't know. Her grandma's got ther travelin' craze, wunderlust, Lyddy calls it, an' wants ter take her abroad, but Lyddy says no. She air comin' home ter rest, thet there's time ernough ter travel later."

"I hope she will," said Philip. "Give her my love and tell her my colt, Trixy, is well broken to the saddle and I will bring her over when Lydia comes home, so she can ride when she pleases. Good-by, Aunt Rhue."

"No, ye don't say no good-by, Philip Strong, till ye hev sampled my fresh gingerbread with er glass uv Jersey milk; then ye can go an' good luck ter ye, fer ye wuz allus er good boy. Ye'd better stay ter dinner."

"Thank you, Aunt Rhue, but that lunch was delicious," said Philip, as he drained the glass. "Now, I'm off," and, giving her a bear hug as of old, was gone.

"Likely boy," said Aunt Rhue, as he mounted his horse and cantered off.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Why, Grandmother, you have left only three invitations for me to send to the home people. How is that?"

"Why, Lydia, is that not enough? Thy friends to be invited are limited, thee knows; so I thought three would be enough."

"Oh, Grandmother!" and the tears started, "to think of my sending only three invitations back to dear old Lebanon and Alden. I must have more. There is Grandma and Grandpa, one; Philip Strong, two; Uncle Si Newman, three; Mr. and Mrs. Leggett, four; the Postmaster, my Sunday-school teacher, Miss Adams, five; Rev. and Mrs. Peabody, six; Mrs. Lillian St. Alban, Boston, seven; Mr. Philip Anderson, in Denver, eight; and Sallie Woodbridge, my dearest seatmate at school, nine."

"Lydia Wilbur, does thee think it necessary to remember all those country people," said the soft, but firm voice of Mrs. Filmore. "There is not one who in all probability will come."

"Grandmother, what makes you think so. Of course, my friends will come. I would not feel right to graduate and have none of my old friends here. I feel sure Philip would come with Grandpa and Grandma, and it would be just like Uncle Si Newman to come, too. He always does the things

one least expects him to and I would dearly love to have Sallie Woodbridge."

"Lydia, has thee ever stopped to think what a menagerie those country people would be to thy city friends? Of course, I want thy grandparents to come, but Lydia what would thee do with thy old mountain stage-driver?"

Slowly, a flush mounted to Lydia's brow as she replied: "Do with him! Do with Uncle Si Newman! Why, Grandmother, the kindest heart that ever beat is wrapped in his homely body. Do with him! Why, I would try my best to make him happy with the rest of my friends. He is a good man and I love him and want him here when I graduate. It would make him very happy, I know."

"Lydia, thee must not think of such a thing as to mar thy graduation with those uncouth visitors."

"Very well, Grandmother," and her voice quivered, "but, remember, there will be one graduate missing the twenty-second of June, if my friends do not come. I have never deviated a hair's breadth from your wishes since I have been here, but I draw the line on eliminating from this list some of the best people God ever made, simply because they are nature's true noble men and women and all because their diction is imperfect and they wear homespun clothes; and for this, you want me to drop them. Never, Grandmother, never! Those people have been my friends from babyhood and I can not slight them. I beg of you, do not ask me to do so."

"Lydia, I can not allow it. Thee must not take any chances of sending and having them accept

your invitations. I have other plans for thee, and thee must abide by my decision."

"Grandmother, again I say, my friends must be invited or I will not graduate. I would not hurt their feelings or change my love for them for the whole of Philadelphia. We may as well settle it now. I will not graduate;" so saying, she quietly left the room.

Slowly, she went up-stairs and, entering her room, looked around at the plain but elegant furnishings, with every evidence of luxury. Crossing the room, she dropped on her knees by a window and, leaning her elbows on the ledge, buried her head in her arms, sobbing:

"Dear old Lebanon, why did I ever leave it to learn the ways of the cold and polished world? How I would love to run down to the crystal spring this moment and cool this throbbing with a draft of its precious drops. Oh, Grandma, oh, Grandpa! 'True hearts are more than coronets and simple faith than Norman blood.' Why did you send me away from you, or rather allow me to come away from your love and peace and happiness. Oh, Mother, at last I know why you suffered and sacrificed and finally died on Lebanon. Dear old Lebanon, and fourteen years of solid happiness."

The sound of the dinner-gong resounding through the house aroused her. She arose and, clearing away all trace of emotion, descended and entered the dining-room where her grandmother awaited her. After the butler had quietly served them and left the room, Mrs. Filmore said:

"Lydia, I have changed my mind and have

ordered a half dozen more invitations. With what thee now has, it will total nine. Send them to whom thee will, but, remember, we can entertain only thy grandparents here."

"Thank you, Grandmother," Lydia replied, without raising her eyes.

After school that afternoon, on her way home, Lydia switched off Chestnut Street and rapidly walked down a side street until she came to an old-fashioned but very genteel-looking house, set well back from the street, and surrounded by large trees, a neatly kept yard filled with shrubs and old-fashioned flowers added to its attractiveness. In the window was a sign, "Rooms to let." Lydia opened the gate and walked up the clean brick walk to the wide veranda. Here, she ascended the steps and raised the old brass knocker and waited breathlessly for an answer. This was her first business venture.

Soon, the door was opened by an elderly Quakeress, who bade her come in. "Thank you, but I will state my errand first. Have you rooms to let, and do you ever furnish food for those who take your rooms?"

"Sometimes, dear. Thee must come in and I will show thee my vacant rooms."

"Please, madam, allow me to explain," said Lydia, as she sat down in the cool and pleasant parlor. "I expect to graduate from the Young Ladies' Seminary in two weeks. I have some very dear friends that I expect are coming from far off Vermont, and I would like at least three rooms for three days only — one for my grandparents, one for Uncle Si and Philip, they can room together

and one for emergency, and I will pay for it whether it is used or not."

"Well, dear, I think I can accommodate thee and thy friends for that short time with room and board."

"I thank you for your kindness. It makes me very happy and I know you will love my grandmother. She is the dearest grandmother a girl ever had."

CHAPTER XXII.

"Dear Grandpa and Grandma:

"I am so happy at the thought of seeing you very soon. I have your room all ready and will meet you at the station. Tell Philip, or you do it, to telegraph when you leave Bolton. Be sure to come the twenty-first so as to get rested and shop a little. I can hardly wait to see your dear faces, my precious ones. Tell Uncle Si to be sure to come. I have written Philip. I hope to be able to return home with you. Much love.

"Lydia."

"Wall, Mother, what do ye think uv thet?" and Uncle Nat pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and brushed the moisture from his eyes as he folded the letter and held it caressingly in his hand. "Lyddy seems ter take it fer granted we air goin' to Philadelphy; but how in all creation we can manage it, I can't see."

"Now, see here, Father, ther first thing to settle

is: Do ye want ter go? Ef ye do, ther rest is easy ernuf. Lyddy is our girl. We saw her father graduate an' receive his diploma an' it pleased him. An' now it's up to you. Ef ye want ter go, thet settles it; I'm with ye. Er trip ter Bolton, er call at ther bank, er few purchases, an' we air ready. Miss Snow will go with us an' help me shop an' we kin call on Philip ter help out, an' thar it is."

"Wall, Mother, I'll go do ther chores an' we'll settle ther question arter supper. By hookey, I hardly know how ter leave so much baby stock on hand."

"Do go erlong, Father. There'll be plenty uv baby stock ter look arter when we can't go ter Philadelphia, an' Lyddy won't graduate ev'ry spring."

The next morning, bright and early, Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue started for Bolton. It was a whole day's trip to Bolton and return, and they must stop at Alderson for Miss Snow, the dressmaker, and go by train to Bolton. When they left the train at Bolton, they went at once to the Vermont National Bank. Soon, Uncle Nat came out and handed Aunt Rhue a roll of bills, saying: "Sail in, Mother, an' don't stint yerself. I'm goin' fer Philip."

Miss Snow piloted Aunt Rhue to a large and fashionable dry goods establishment, where they deliberately proceeded to shop. They first selected material for a traveling-dress, a lovely shade of rich dark brown merino, with velvet of a harmonizing color to trim. A pair of brown kid gloves came next. Then, a handsome silver-gray silk of superior texture was chosen with proper trimmings. A real lace collar and cuffs and pair of delicate light gray kid gloves completed this purchase.

The next article asked for was a wrap. The clerk,

being delighted with so good a customer, took pains to show everything to the best advantage. Finally, they settled on an elegant, heavy, black silk mantilla for traveling use and a silvery, white crepe, hand-embroidered shawl for the graduating. After a visit to the show and millinery departments, they went to meet Uncle Nat and Philip, who took them to a late but substantial dinner. Uncle Nat was loaded with various parcels, but never a word of their contents. After dinner, as they left the hotel, Uncle Nat said: "How erbout a present fer Lyddy?"

After much consultation, they settled on an all round satisfactory gift, and after securing that and a few other purchases, made ready for the return trip home.

As the time drew near for the journey to Philadelphia, Aunt Rhue nightly scrubbed and polished her hands and face with soda and buttermilk, alternating with an application of Indian meal, and Miss Snow washed and brushed her abundant and beautiful gray hair until it seemed almost twice its usual amount.

Uncle Nat hunted up his grammar and dictionary, and together he and Aunt Rhue went over it and were cautious to drop every mountain phrase possible, correcting each other, making much pleasantry, and they soon fell back into their youthful manner of speech. It was hard at first, but they persevered. Aunt Rhue said, "Nothin' wan't too much ter do fer ther leetle gal," and they would try and not cause her to blush for them.

As the train pulled in to Philadelphia on the afternoon of June twenty-first, and the passengers

began to alight, a trio stepped to the platform and almost immediately a pair of young arms was thrown about Aunt Rhue's neck and a sweet voice said:

"Oh, the loveliest of grandmothers! How happy I am, and Grandfather, too," and as she kissed him, she could not restrain the tears. "Dear Uncle Si, too! How glad I am to see you. But where is Philip?"

"Philip cuddent come with us, Lyddy," said Si, "but he'll be on hand termorrow."

Lydia quickly led them to a fine carriage with prancing horses and driver and footman in livery. The colored footman opened the door and, as they entered, Lydia gave the direction where to go. Shortly, the driver stopped before Mrs. Montgomery's home and soon the travelers were in their rooms. Lydia, on removing her grandmother's dainty brown straw bonnet, neatly trimmed with velvet of the same shade, exclaimed:

"Oh, Grandmother! You are just lovely. What have you and Grandpa done to yourselves. Oh! I am so happy. I brought you all to this quiet place to rest and spend the night. To-morrow, you are coming to Grandmother Filmore's. I know she is expecting you to-night, but I just wanted you to my own self the first night. I am going home now, but will return for you and help you get ready for the concert to-night. I am so sorry Philip is not here."

As Lydia entered her home, her grandmother met her with an anxious face. "Why, Lydia, where are thy grandparents? I was sure they would miss the train. How unfortunate, now it will spoil our entire evening to have to meet a later train."

"O, no, Grandmother. They did not miss the train. They came all right, and Uncle Si Newman came with them."

"What does thee mean, Lydia?"

"That I have just left them safely at Mrs. Horace Montgomery's, in Locust Street. They are resting there and, after the coachman has taken you to Music Hall this evening, I would like, with your permission, to have him take us to the concert."

"Why, Lydia!"

"Pardon me, but I am very tired and will go at once to my room."

"Whoever would have thought that quiet, docile child would do such a thing! I am greatly surprised and chagrined. What will her grandparents think, and they so kind to me always. Lydia, why did thee humiliate me so. I see I must take thee in hand more firmly, my child, I can see that plainly; but I will wait until later."

When Lydia and her party reached Music Hall, Lydia motioned to an usher and said: "Charles, please take my friends to the seats reserved for them next to Mrs. Filmore in row six, center aisle." Then, turning to them, said: "I must leave you in Mrs. Filmore's care. I have a little surprise for you, so please excuse me for a time, but I will see you later. Grandmother Filmore will entertain you," and Lydia hurried away.

If Mrs. Filmore felt any surprise at the daintily gowned woman to whom she extended a welcome, she never showed it, nor did she move a muscle when Uncle Nat shook her hand warmly.

When seated, she had time for but a few commonplace questions, when strains of distant music

filled the hall. Low and sweet, it sounded. As it came nearer, the curtain slowly raised as if by magic and disclosed to view a train of beautiful young women, advancing two by two. At their head, walked Lydia alone. A vision of loveliness, she was simply clad in a pure white gown of finest sheer muslin. Her only ornament was a wreath of wild white anemone, entwined with the delicate green of the Vermont maiden-hair fern. Slowly, they took their places, and Lydia sat down to a magnificent harp a little to the left, but in front of her class.

Si Newman nudged Uncle Nat and whispered: "Gosh all fish-hooks, Nat, ef thet gal don't look jest like our Lyddy."

"Hush, Si, that is Lydia."

"Wall, wall, I wish ter thunder Phil Strong wuz here," he murmured. "I allus thought she wuz han'some, but I'll be gosh-darned all she lacks now is ther wings ter make her look like er real angel."

As Lydia lightly touched the strings, a melody of soft, sweet music fell on the audience. Si Newman gasped and whispered: "Is this 'ere place heaven or am I dreamin'?" Back in a corner, stood a young man, with folded arms in deep revery, who thought the same. With a sigh of pleasure, he advanced and took a seat. At the close of the number, there was tremendous applause and Lydia responded with an old-fashioned selection, "Annie Laurie," that brought tears to more than one. It was so unexpected, but Lydia knew why she played it. It was for the dear home folk she played and she put every bit of melody possible into it. It seemed as though they must know it was for them. "But where was Philip?"

At the close, numerous bouquets were thrown or carried to her by the ushers. Among them, was a large bunch of snowy lilacs. As she received this, she buried her face for a moment in its sweet, pungent fragrance and selecting a spray, tucked it in her belt, and bowing, sat down.

In the rear, a young man murmured: "God bless her. They have not spoiled my mountain-queen."

The musical was a success as was also the banquet that followed it. The little country girl had acquitted herself creditably and admirably, and her friends were pleased—none more so than the Lebanonites. On their way home, as the carriage stopped in Locust Street, Lydia said to her Grandmother Filmore:

"I will run in just for a minute with Grandma."

As she was about to leave, she said: "Good night, dear ones," and, after kissing her grandparents good night, she advanced to Si Newman and said: "Good night, Uncle Si. May I just kiss you once for the Overland's sake? I am so happy."

Si's face was as red as a turkey gobbler as he grabbed her and gave her a kiss. "Jerusalem artichokes, Lyddy, I leetle thought ther first ride I ever gin ye in ther Overland, nigh eighteen year ago, ye would ever come ter this, but yer all right."

"But it was too bad," said Lydia, "that Philip was not here to-night. It was my only disappointment. I did want him so much."

"Wall, Lydia, I think yer wuz purty well supported by ther way ther young men hung eround yer ternight," Si teased.

With a smile, Lydia replied: "They were not

Philip though," and, with a last good night, she hurriedly left them.

If Mrs. Filmore was surprised at Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue the evening before, she was completely dumbfounded at the dignified, gentle bearing of this couple as they entered her spacious parlors — Uncle Nat, resplendent in fine broadcloth and patent leathers, immaculate linen and clean-shaven, followed by Aunt Rhue, gowned in her dainty silver-gray silk and real lace, with bonnet and gloves to match, with the rich, soft folds of her creamy white crepe falling gracefully around her. Even Uncle Si, with his neat suit of gray and new calf-skin boots, polished until they shone, did not look out of place. Lydia had pleaded that he might be of the party.

Uncle Nat was intelligently conversant on all the topics of the day. This pleased Mrs. Filmore very much.

Lydia took her grandmother up to her room to remove her wraps and show her that part of the house.

At dinner, Mrs. Filmore was again surprised and pleased to see the proper handling of fork and spoon, and came to the conclusion that they would do even in the city.

The graduating-exercises were very interesting, with Lydia as valedictorian, and many of her young friends crowded around her as they left the building. At this period, a young man, fashionably attired, stepped up to Lydia and extended his hand in congratulation.

"Oh, Philip! When did you come? I am delighted to see you."

"I cam in last evening," said Philip with a smile, "but thought it best not to disturb you."

"Come, Philip, and meet my friends," she exclaimed, drawing his arm through hers. "This is my foster brother, Philip Strong," she said, as she introduced him to her many friends and admirers. Shortly after, he excused himself, saying business of importance necessitated that he return to Bolton by the next train. On saying good-by, Lydia told him she was going home the next day with her grandparents. This brought a smile to Philip's face. "And you will be sure to come to see me soon?"

"Yes, thank you. I surely will," replied Philip.

Late as it was that night when Lydia retired to her room, she partly packed her traveling-bag in happy anticipation of her trip; then again admired the many presents she had received. Nearly every one she knew had remembered her. Her quiet, gentle, womanly ways had won many friends. There were flowers galore, silver toilet articles, books, vases, personal wearing apparel, a tiny gold watch and chain from her grandparents. A narrow band of finest gold set with one great lustrous pearl, with a card that bore the name of Si Newman, sent her into ecstacies of happiness.

"Dear Uncle Si," she murmured.

One large package contained the latest books on harp music, with a note saying: "Be sure to take it with you, for you will need it on Lebanon." The young women of the school and the faculty had purchased a fine harp that was already on its way to Lebanon. A small box that had come during the evening before she reached home, contained a por-

trait of her mother, painted on ivory. The card with this bore a single word, "Philip."

From her Grandmother Filmore was a small ruby ring and a set of sterling silver teaspoons and cream ladle marked with her mother's maiden name and a note saying that it had been her mother's last birthday gift, but had never been removed from their wrappings. At this, Lydia broke down and sobbed.

"Dear mother! Oh, if you were only here! Did you and Father look down on your child last night and to-day, and were you pleased?"

The next morning, she was astir early and resumed her packing. Her grandmother, on hearing her, sent her maid requesting Lydia to come to her room. As she entered, Mrs Filmore looked up from a letter she was reading and said:

"Good morning; sit down, Lydia." When her grandmother finished reading the letter, she said: "Lydia, thee must postpone thy visit to Lebanon. Company is coming unexpectedly, and I need thee here."

"Oh, Grandmother! Is it necessary for me to remain? Grandma and Grandpa will be so disappointed and so will I. I am so tired and need the change, and I have looked forward to going with them so much. Please excuse me and let me go."

"Lydia, thee can not go. It is settled. We will discuss it no longer. My Grandnephew Anderson and his friend will be here to-morrow, and thee must be here to help entertain them. Thee must be sensible. Remember, thee is a young lady now and can not have thy way as of old. We will discuss this no longer. Ring for Phyllis that I may instruct

her about the guest-rooms, and thee had better go to thy grandparents as soon as thee has thy breakfast and inform them thee can not go."

Tears rushed to Lydia's eyes. Her great disappointment was visible. As she opened her lips to speak, her grandmother said: "No more of this babyishness. Assume thy womanhood."

Lydia left the room crushed, rebellion visible in every move. She put on her hat and left word with the maid to tell her grandmother she did not care for breakfast, and went silently out the door. Quickly, she walked to Mrs. Montgomery's and entered her grandmother's room, and with tears, exclaimed:

"O, Grandma! What do you think? I can not go with you. What shall I do? My heart is breaking."

"Hush, Lydia," said Aunt Rhue, as she slipped her arm around her. "Don't cry, child, but tell us the reason."

"Oh! Some horrid relatives are coming, and grandmother wants me to stay and help entertain them, and I just can not. My trunk is packed and everything is ready for me to go."

Her grandfather said: "Never mind, Lydia, you do just as she wants you to this time. Smother your disappointment and say nothing; but when we get you on Lebanon again, it will be your 'inning' and you can stay just as long as you want to, and no one can dispute our right to keep you. Be sensible, now, and, as much as it means to us to leave you here, it may be all for the best." He put a roll of bills in her hand and said: "If the time ever comes when you want to see us and old Lebanon, just slip away, and Si Newman or Philip will see

you home. Now, dry your tears and be our own good little girl once more. Never fear, we will soon meet again. We will just say good-by here and you will not feel it as much as if you went to the station." He folded her in his arms and, kissing her, said: "Lydia, never forget your father was a soldier and a brave man."

Her grandmother had kept silent, though Lydia's grief and disappointment seemed almost too much to bear in silence; but she kissed her and said: "You will soon be home, Lyddy. Write to us often and remember there is always a welcome waiting our little girl on Lebanon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

After a busy day, Philip was going over the evening mail and he came to an envelope postmarked Philadelphia. He hastily opened and drew forth the following:

"Dear Philip:

"I have just learned this morning where the lilacs came from. I was disappointed in not going home with Grandma, so could not wait to thank you in person. Uncle Si, with one of his sly winks, told me just as he was leaving that he guessed Philip Strong knew where some of my 'posies come from.' But I have been unable to find out where the dear little white anemones came from. They came just as I was about to leave home for the concert, so I carried the box with me and hurriedly

put them on after reaching the hall. Thank you again for the lilacs. They were lovely, Philip.

"Oh, just a word more! It seemed to me when I put on the anemones that, if I closed my eyes, I was again in dear old silver-beech hollow. I presume you have forgotten all about crystal spring and silver-beech hollow.

"Write to me, Philip. It has been a long time since I have heard from you.

"Your old friend,
"Lydia."

In due time, a reply came to Lydia's letter.

"Bolton, Mass.

"Dear Lydia:

"Yours of the 25th at hand. Yes, Lydia, it was I that gave you the lilacs, and I gathered the anemones in silver-beech hollow, near crystal spring. I had not forgotten. That was the reason I did not go on the same train with your grandparents and Uncle Si. While they were speeding on to Philadelphia, I was picking anemones. I then went up to the house and took the liberty to cut some lilacs from Aunt Rhue's prize bush. I hastened on horseback and caught the next train, and was in Philadelphia for the concert. The anemones were sent to your house by messenger after I had taken them to a florist and had them arranged in proper form for the occasion. The lilacs, I carried myself. I had made up my mind if you did not wear them or notice them, I would steal away unnoticed and take the night train for Bolton. But I find that more than four years of city life and associates

have not changed your love for common country flowers and folk.

"I am to enter Judge Palmer's law-office in September and complete my course with him. I am busy on the record or docket-searching staff at present.

"Always the same old friend,
"Philip."

Two long and one short blast of Si Newman's horn warned the folk at Sunnyslope (Lydia's name for the Lebanon farm) that some one was coming. Uncle Nat dropped his hoe and hastened toward the house. Stopping at the milk-house door, where Aunt Rhue was working a mass of golden-hued butter, he called:

"Say, Mother, did ye hear Si's horn?"

"Yes, Father, I did; but it's only some uv them air tourists I suppose arter er drink uv fresh butter-milk. Si knows it's churnin' day. I'm glad it's sweet an' fresh."

She had scarcely turned again to her work when a pair of arms were flung around her neck from behind, and she heard: "Oh, Grandma, I am so tired!"

"Land er massy, sakes alive! Why, Lyddy Wilbur, whar under ther sun did ye come frum?" She turned just as Lydia slipped to the floor.

Aunt Rhue dropped the butter-ladle and called for Uncle Nat, who was not far away: "Here, Father, quick; don't stand there so helpless. Take hold uv Lyddy an' help carry her in ter ther lounge. Pore child! travelin' this long distance. Bring ther camfire while I take off her things. Now, Father,

jest start ther fire an' put on ther kittle an' we'll soon hev Lyddy ez chipper ez ever."

She tenderly removed the wraps, loosed her neck and wrist bands, and bathed her temples, but there was no sign of returning consciousness.

"Father, go into my room, quick, an' bring ther little bottle Lyddy give me when she graduated; now, hurry!"

Before he returned, Lydia opened her eyes and asked: "Where am I?"

"Why, Lyddy, child, ye air home on Lebanon. Now lay still an' rest. Ye air all right. Er cup uv Imperial with real cream will soon restore ye." As she stood looking down at Lydia, two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

Aunt Rhue was a wise woman and tiptoed lightly into the kitchen, murmuring: "Ef thet old curmudgeon with all her thees an' thous hez hurt our leetle gal, she'll pay fer it. Pore little thing, all we've got in ther world." Quietly, she went about her task of preparing the evening meal, bemoaning the fact that she did not know Lydia was coming so that she could have more variety.

Every few minutes, she stole to the door to listen to the easy, quiet breathing, which told that Lydia was sleeping the sleep of weariness and exhaustion. Uncle Nat poked his head in the door occasionally to hear how she was and Jake did most of the chores that night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was midsummer on Lebanon. Lydia had long ago recovered from the severe strain and was blithe and happy. The one thing that was disturbing the peace of Lebanon at this time was the news that an impertinent railroad proposition was about to poke its nose into the valley below and worm its way on through to Alden Center.

On Philip's last visit, he had told them about it and the weekly paper had threshed out the question, and now they were sure it was bona fide. Every afternoon, with field-glass in hand, Lydia would cross the road and disappear through the south orchard and on until she reached the brow of the ledge lot, where she could look for miles down the valley either way.

The surveyor's gang was busy blazing trees and placing stations of pegs to mark the trail as they pressed forward. Here and there along the line gleamed the white tent homes of the different gangs. They seemed a quiet, unobtrusive lot of men and kept much to themselves. But the dread of the flotsam and jetsam of the large cities being brought there and dumped among those dear old hills, brought resentment among the farmers. Even the huge granite boulders seemed to resent it with their grim, gray shoulders standing out as sentinels against the sky.

"Wall, Lyddy, whar air ye off ter this early in ther day?" asked Uncle Nat, looking up from his harness-mending just inside the barn-door, as Lydia stood before him, dressed in a short riding-habit of dark bottle-green cloth. Her little hat of finest

felt to match in color her habit, had a long, black quill stuck jauntily in the side and her neat brown riding-gauntlets completed her costume. Her abundant chestnut-brown hair was tumbled by the wind and full of tiny kinky curls that seemed to love to fall next her neck and cheek, which was all pink and dimpled. Her eyes, the same color as her hair, danced with the joy of health and happiness shining in them. She looked a veritable picture as she stood framed in the wide barn-door.

"I am going to Alden, Grandpa, and will stay with Mrs. St. Alban for lunch. You know she is here for the summer with her babies. Can I do anything for you?"

"Wall, I dunno ez ye'd care ter take this 'ere strap an' leave it with Jim, ther cobbler. I want this 'ere buckle sewed on good an' strong."

"Sure, I will. Just hand it to me, and I'll bring it back to you when I return. I am glad to do it. Here comes Jake with Trix, and she wants her apple before we go. How I love her! Do you suppose Philip would sell her? It was so good of Philip to train and bring her to me. But, Grandpa, I can not keep her much longer. Philip will be home from Boston the last of the week, and must find her in her stall. Hand me the strap, Jake, if you please." As she settled herself in the saddle, she said: "This is a glorious morning for a canter."

Her grandfather came with the strap himself and, as he handed it to her, she bent and touched his forehead with her lips and was off.

Trix loped along until she reached the highway; then Lydia tightened the rein and the horse, with high head, cantered along. For some distance, the

road lay straight ahead. The rays of the sun cast dancing shadows from the branches overhead. The voice of the meadow lark in teaching her brood to fly was heard. The late yellow violets nodded their tiny heads from the fence corners and a shadow crossed her path from overhead. Stopping her horse and looking up, she saw a huge hawk circling on tilted wing above her, ready for a plunge on some unsuspecting prey. Lydia drew rein. Her face was flushed with happiness; she patted her horse on the neck lovingly and said:

"Let's have a race, Trixy, to the corner."

The horse pricked up her ears and, as she felt free rein, dashed away, full of life, both maiden and animal gloriously enjoying the race. On and on, they went as free as the delicious wind that fanned their faces. Down past the hazel dell and over the little bridge. Trix, with dilated nostrils and flowing mane, enjoyed the race as well as Lydia. They had almost reached the turn to Alden Center, leaving a cloud of dust behind them, when suddenly the sharp report of a rifle sent Trix plunging into the air. Lydia rose in her saddle and, clutching her horse's mane, began to pat her neck. Again, the loud report was heard; again, Lydia patted and called to the animal to stop; but she reared in a frightful manner and came to a stand-still so abruptly as to send Lydia flying to the ground a few feet distant.

"Are you hurt?" immediately called a voice from across the road. "Oh, how careless of me!" and instantly there bent over her a young man.

"Not a bit hurt, thank you. Just help me to my feet. Trix, that was a disgraceful break."

The young man tried to raise Lydia to her feet. A cry of pain caused him to lower her carefully to the ground again.

"I think I have turned my ankle. Please help me on my horse that I may return home at once."

Again, the young man helped her. A spasm of pain crossed the white face, but she resolutely pulled herself together and said: "Please bring my horse near and help me to the saddle. I will be all right."

He made a stirrup of his hands and bade her rest one hand on his shoulder, and he placed her in her saddle; then, removing his hat, he said:

"I am more grieved than I can express. It would be cowardly to beg pardon for such gross carelessness. I will lead your horse carefully and make the return trip home. You are a plucky girl, all right. In the meantime, I will introduce myself as Roger Connolly, and I believe I am addressing Miss Wilbur, of Lebanon."

"Yes, I am Miss Wilbur." As she spoke, her voice trembled with the suffering of pain. "You must hurry, Trixy."

"Father, come quick. Thar's er young man comin' through ther gate, leadin' Trix, an' Lyddy is settin' up like er stick on her back. Hurry up."

"I'm comin', Mother," and Uncle Nat emerged from the smoke-house with a plump, sugar-cured ham, which he quickly dropped at sight of Lydia's white face. "Jerusalem artichokes," he exclaimed, "what in the world is ther matter with our leetle gal?" As he lifted her from the saddle, she fainted.

"Here, young man, help me get my granddaughter in ther house. The camfire, Mother, quick. There, there! She's all right now," as they placed her on

the lounge. Turning to the stranger, he demanded: "Now, young man, give an account uv yer share in this affair," as he quietly loosened her little riding-boot.

At this, Lydia opened her eyes. "This is Mr. Connolly, Grandpa, and he has been very kind, kind ———" and she again drifted off into unconsciousness.

"Mother, jest blow ther horn fer Jake ter go fer ther doctor. Ther child must be looked arter."

"Please, Mr. Wilbur, may I have that privilege?" and, before Uncle Nat could answer, the young man was on Trix and down the road.

"Now, Father, ye gather some wormwood ez quick ez ye kin, bruise it well, moisten with some vinegar, an' bring it ter me. In ther meantime, I will loosen her clothes an' git her ter bed. Pore leetle gal, so happy this mornin'."

By this time, Lydia's ankle was swollen and red and, each time it was touched, brought forth a low moan.

"By cracky, I'd jest like ter know how it happened," said Uncle Nat.

The wormwood was carefully bandaged about the swollen ankle. Aunt Rhue stood with camphor-bottle in hand, while Uncle Nat, with glass and spoon in hand, was trying tenderly to coax her to swallow a little grape wine.

"Take it, child, it will do yer good."

After a few swallows, Lydia opened her eyes and asked: "What is the matter? Where am I?"

"Nothing ser'us, child, ye only hurt yer foot, but it'll soon be all right. Lie quiet an' rest."

Uncle Nat sat by Lydia's side while Aunt Rhue

busied herself with preparations for dinner. As she stepped to the door to blow the dinner-horn, the doctor rode up to the door, leading Trix.

CHAPTER XXV.

Several weeks later, Si Newman's toot warned the hill-folk there was news for them. Uncle Nat walked down to the stage and soon returned with several letters and papers, one of which was from Lydia's grandmother. As Lydia unfolded the letter and began to read, the color deepened in her cheeks.

"Dear Lydia:

"The train that carries this letter would find me en route for Mt. Lebanon were it not such a long and hot journey this time of the year, so I am doing the next best thing — writing my plans. I have concluded to go to Europe and spend the autumn and winter there, and have also decided that thee must accompany me. It will do thee good. Thee will meet distinguished people, and we will float from city to city, visit famous art-galleries, and attend musical concerts, the like of which thee has never known. My friend, Mrs. Brown, and son, David, will be of the party. Just think of what is in store for thee! I will personally attend to replenishing thy wardrobe. Let me hear from thee at once. My respects to thy grandparents. With love,

"Thy grandmother,
"Margaret Filmore."

Aunt Rhue was sitting near and noticed Lydia's agitation, but said nothing.

"This letter is from Grandmother Filmore," said Lydia, and proceeded to read it aloud. When she had finished, she asked: "What do you think of that? I wish she would not bother me so. I no sooner get settled in mind, before she looms up with some new plan. I am so happy here with you and Grandpa. By the way, there is something I want to talk about while we are alone."

"Wall, Lyddy, what is it?"

"Do you think Grandpa looks well? He does not eat as usual and seems so tired all the time. I feel worried about him.

"Lyddy, yer grandfather is not well," replied Aunt Rhue, with quick words and a sigh.

"Don't you think life is a great mystery, Grandma? So many different people, so many different troubles, so many beautiful things, so many things to disturb one, so many unnecessary trials, so many unkindnesses that hurt. I often think of that little verse and how true it is:

" 'So many gods, so many creeds,
So many ways that wind and wind,
When everything this old world needs,
Is just the act of being kind.' "

"Yes, Lyddy, ye air erbout right. Life is ruther er cur'us thing. I often liken it ter er bit uv tapestry er colored embroidery with its glint uv brightness an' shadow, joy an' sorrow, happiness an' misery. It's life an', in ther end, death, all an alternating web; here er bit uv sunshine, ther er bit uv cloud, here er shade uv darkness, there er bit of light.

I tell ye, Lyddy, it's er hit an' miss stripe, all right. Ther loom uv life weaves slow but it weaves correct in ther end. We reap what we sow. We can't sow harsh words an' reap blessings any more than we can sow evil, tantalizing deeds, an' expect good results. Some people look down on ther workin' man er woman, but labor is pure an' good — a noble thing it is, ther savor of life, ther girdle uv true manliness an' womanliness."

"I understand as never before," said Lydia, slowly. "What can I do in a case like this? I do not want to go, yet I don't want to do nor say anything to vex Grandmother Filmore. I simply can not go with her and live as though I cared for her, when I do not. What is travel and sight-seeing to peace and happiness. No, Grandma, please do not ask me to. She is just beginning to reap what she sowed twenty years ago when Mother, dear little Mother, was forced to leave home. She is an unnatural grandmother and wants me only from selfish motives. I shall write this very night and tell her I can not go."

"Now, Lyddy, don't be harsh. Yer grandmother hez suffered, I reckon. Don't reproach her. Hide yer feelin's, child, hide 'em. Jest smile 'em all erway."

"It's all right, Grandma, but you did not live under the same roof four years with her. It's all charity and philanthropy and worrying and working to better the surroundings and beautify the old Quaker church."

"Never mind, Lyddy. Ye jest do yer part. Be er good girl an' don't slight yer grandmother. But yer don't hev ter go ter Europe ef yer don't want ter."

"Grandma, how I love you. What a good and true woman you are!"

"La, child, better run open ther oven-door. I smell them Pound Sweets bakin' an' I'll wager they're done ter er turn."

"Grandma lives her religion," Lydia said to herself, as she crossed the room. "It takes more than going to church and saying grace to constitute a Christian. She doesn't sit with folded hands and crossed feet, waiting for the millennium. I've come to the conclusion that the accident of birth does not always constitute relationship. Patrick Henry said: 'I'm not responsible for being born, but it's my outlook to hold on to my equality.'" As she closed the oven door and looked up, the room was empty.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The next morning was bright and the warm, cheery sunshine greeted Mrs. Filmore as she looked out the library-window. The rain clouds had disappeared. Streaks of blue showed through the light, fluffy clouds; a robin was tilting up and down in an effort to pull from the sward a plump worm for her breakfast. Shadows from the trees formed a delicate tracery on the criss-cross brick walk leading to the street.

"I wonder what train Lydia will come on. I must have David meet them all. What a handsome couple they will make. David will have plenty of

time to court Lydia in real, old-fashioned loverlike way, on the boat going over, and Lydia must answer yes when the vital question is asked. I will look out for that. Those two fortunes united will make a royal inheritance for Lydia. She simply must not vegetate longer on Lebanon. I dare not risk it."

The postman's quick tread aroused Mrs. Filmore, and soon through the open door came Chloe with the morning mail. Selecting one postmarked Alderson, Vermont, she thought:

"This will tell the story; it will answer the problem and tell me the train on which Lydia will come."

Opening it, still standing, she withdrew the sheet and read:

"Dear Grandmother:

"How kind and sweet of you to invite me on that lovely trip to Europe with you next month. I surely appreciate how delightful it would be, but, Grandmother, I must beg to decline. I feel it my duty and pleasure to stay on Lebanon this summer. Grandpa Wilbur is far from well, and I know it would be wrong to leave Grandma alone and go so far away. So please pardon me for not accepting your invitation. I shall hope to hear from you often during your travels. Remember me to Chloe and Aunt Mandy. Tell Calib not to forget the roses and laburnums.

"Your loving granddaughter,

"Lydia Wilbur."

Slowly, Mrs. Filmore folded and replaced the letter in its envelope; then, seating herself, she dropped her head in deep thought, murmuring: "She does not want to go. Hopes to hear from me

often. Well, we will see about that. Art thou crazy, Lydia Wilbur, to throw away such a trip for an old man who is quite likely to live for years? Thee must not do it. I will not allow it. Thee must and will accompany me on this trip or all is lost. I wonder if thou art interested in some country booby. No, no, Lydia is too fastidious for that. It really must be her love and respect for venerable years that is keeping her. Her appeal for pardon, though a pathetic one, will not be granted. No, Lydia, thee must and shall go with me. Thy foolish whim about thy grandparents is nonsense."

She arose and touched a bell-rope. When the servant answered, she said: "Chloe, tell Calib to have the carriage at the door at 9:45 sharp. I am going to see Miss Lydia."

"Am Miss Lyddy sick?"

"No, Chloe, thy young mistress is not ill, but I think a few days among the mountains will do me good. I leave everything in thy care, Chloe. Look well to thy charge. Now pack my bag for several days' journey."

"Grandmother Filmore, please don't. I can like almost anybody and anything, but I am too old to be driven. As for David, I care not whether he exists or not. My self-respect and loyalty to true womanhood will not allow myself to be thrown at any man. No, this is final. I am of age and my own mistress. I have enough of my very own to take care of me. I thank you, but I can not accompany you to Europe this time."

Mrs. Filmore began to realize that all was over. Lydia would not leave Lebanon. Her anger knew

no bounds, but she kept it well restrained. Embarrassment was plainly visible.

"Very well, Lydia, thee will repent thy decision when it will be too late. I am completely surprised at your ingratitude."

Lydia wearily raised her hand to her forehead and choking back a sob replied: "Grandmother, I am not ungrateful. I fully appreciate all you have ever done for me. You wonder why I prefer to stay on Lebanon. I will tell you frankly, as I am driven to it. You gave me a lovely home, exquisite clothes, educational advantages, surrounded me with luxury and everything that money could buy; but to the homesick country girl, bereft of the tenderest ties of sympathy and affection, you gave no love, never the slightest, tiniest bit. Grandmother, there was not a soul in the whole city so hungry as I. How I longed and thirsted for the tender love and care of my precious Lebanon grandparents. Yes, I longed for the privilege of throwing my arms around even old Brindle's neck, or having the loving caress of Rover.

"Now, you know what the ties are that bind me here — love — and at the same time make a trip to Europe with you impossible. The time once existed when I loved you and no sacrifice would have been too great for me to make for you, but, Grandmother, I can not suffer again as I have, even to please you. Forgive me, but I don't want to go to Europe. I don't want to meet any more what you call refined people. I am no fighter — only a common flesh and blood country girl. I am unaccustomed to men and years with them would make no difference. I have suffered enough. Please leave me here in peace."

This was too much for Aunt Rhue. "I'll tell ye, ma'am, better leave ther leetle gal alone. Livin' on Lebanon may not improve one in yer society manners, but we're er leetle nearer God an' I fer one am not er goin' ter mortgage Lyddy's happiness, ner bankrupt my own self-respect by launchin' her inter whut ye call society. Ye speak uv Lyddy leadin' er narrer life. In this case, I reckon narreriness is er virtue, an' we've no desire ter swap our places with ther people uv broadenin' views. We may live somewhat by ourselves, but, ef my mem'ry serves me right, people who live in ther cities, an' mind ther own business, an' live quietlike air called exclusive, so I guess we air all right. Howsomever, we don't care a jot. Ther word, society, is only er relative term an' is ez artificial er er paste diamond er a gold brick, which some shysters try ter pa'm off not only on ther country jakes but some uv yer city smarties. This leetle gal uv ours is more to us than society er dresses er jewels er travels. We want ter see her happy, an' when she gits well, mind yer, she can pick an' choose ter suit herself. Her grandpa ner I don't want ter be er stumblin' block in Lyddy's way, but she's got ter git well."

Uncle Nat had taken no part in the conversation until Mrs. Filmore began to insist on Lydia's going as far as Boston with her. Then he arose from his chair by the kitchen-window and walked into the living-room, and said:

"Madam, ye air my guest, but this is my house. We know ye spent er lot uv money on Lyddy. Ye give her an education an' fine clothes. Ye introduced her ter yer friends, an' she rode in fine car-

riages. Don't think fer er minnit, we don't appreciate it, but, mark my words, ye can't force thet child out er this house; no, siree! She's mine, she is; mine an' Mother's, all ther leetle gal we've got. No, Mother, don't talk ter me 'bout calmin' down. I'm goin' ter have my say fer once an' all. Our Lyddy is sweet an' good an' innocent an' she shan't be druv inter no rotten city society. I won't hev her harassed any more. Ef ther time comes when Lyddy wants ter go an' says so uv her own free will, she shall; but till thet time comes, she's goin' ter stay on Lebanon.

"An' ernother thing, yer needn't try ter wheedle her inter doin' anything she don't want ter," and Uncle Nat brought his fist down on the arm of his chair. "She's our'n. Her father wuz our boy. Yes, Mrs. Filmore, her mother was your daughter, but ther least said erbout thet, ther better. We jest happen ter know er leetle erbout yer mother-love fer her."

Uncle Nat sat quiet, with white face and set jaw for a moment, and, without another word, left the room and fell exhausted on the kitchen-lounge.

Aunt Rhue quickly followed and bent over his prostrate form.

"My God!" he murmured. "Mother, did I do wrong?"

"No, no, Father. I guess thet matter's settled fer good an' all."

"Do ye think Lyddy'll hate me," he moaned.

"No, dear Grandpa, my own faithful grandpa. You were a patriot, a regular Patrick Henry," and Lydia smoothed his forehead.

As Aunt Rhue returned to the living-room, Mrs. Filmore was profuse with apologies.

"No apology is necessary, ma'am. We're somewhat like a passel uv hornets here on Lebanon. We can stand considerable stirrin' up, but occasionally hev ter sting. Jest er few words, then we'll close ther case ferever. Ye mustn't make ther mistake ter think because Lyddy's got Filmore blood in her, thet ye can map out her life. Not er bit uv it. Yer kin talk erbout yer blue blood an' aristocracy, but it kinder strikes me thet it don't do no harm ter mix it up occasionally with er leetle good martial-spirited red, an' I sort o' imagine it would hev turned out all right ef Lyddy's parents cud hev lived, God love 'em. Lyddy, ma'am, ef I'm any judge, is quite equal ter engineer any emergency ez it develops an' I want yer ter know ef thet 'ere paper hed read ter give her to you, ye'd never hed ter ask fer her; but ez it didn't, we're goin' ter bide by its rules an' regulations."

"Thee must not be too sure, Sister Wilbur. You may be mistaken."

"Not er bit uv it. I know what I'm talkin' erbout, fer we've got er verbatim copy all right thet'll prove every word on it. It were er hard task fer Father, I assure ye, ter copy ther pore child's dyin' statement, but we thought it might come in handy ter hev her sentiments. No, ma'am, don't say thet fer I hev no desire ter hurt yer feelin's, but ter speak plain, I'm proper glad ter find ye hev some; but ye mustn't fergit, we air all made uv ther same material, nerves an' brain an' hearts. But let's quit ferever. Jest s'pose we let Lyddy cut an' choose fer herself hereafter."

Mrs. Filmore raised her hands in horror. "Why, Friend Wilbur, thee is unreasonable. That is simply impossible. She might become tangled up in some sort of country matrimonial alliance. No, no, that will never do. She must see more of the world. It would be robbing her of her rightful heritage."

"Mrs. Filmore, please excuse me. I must see erbout ther virtuals fer supper."

Once again, the Overland had a passenger from Lebanon and Si Newman thought she was more quiet and dignified than any "goldarned woman" he had ever carried over the road. But when, at the end of the journey, she laid her little gray silk-covered hand in his and said: "I thank thee, Friend Newman, for thy careful, gentle driving," and left a shining gold coin in his hand, he said to himself, when she was gone:

"Gosh all fish-hooks, she's certainly the goldarndest queerest leetle ol' woman I ever sot eyes on, but I take notice she didn't take er mountain daisy back with her an' I'm glad uv it. Lyddy's better off on Leb'non. I'll jest step over ter Jim Johnson's flowery an' buy her er leetle posy. Thet'll jest set her up. She's not been lookin' very pert fer some time. Yer can't fool yer Uncle Si. Thar's somethin' worryin' ther gal an' I know it, but ther sech er close-mouthed crew, them Wilburs. I'm a leetle afraid ther leetle gray woman hez er finger in ther pie, but Si'll lay low an' keep an eye on Lyddy. I wonder why Phil Strong don't show up oftener. Ef Lyddy don't pick up, I'll hev Phil pry inter proceedin's. Who ever thought Phil Strong would ever turn into er full-fledged lawyer? I've hed my eye on him ever since he left Leb'non. Gosh all

fish-hooks, I wonder ef thet sucker, Connolly, hez anything ter do with Lyddy's feelin's. I'll put er shot in his locker some day an' find out."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Very often, Roger Connolly came to see Lydia in the cool of the summer evenings. Their acquaintance ripened into intimacy and many an anxious glance did Aunt Rhue give over her glasses and many a restless night did Uncle Nat have. Connolly was college-educated and many an interesting conversation did Lydia enjoy about college-life. She had had good times at the seminary. Life there had not been all work and no play. One evening, young Connolly said:

"I wish you might go to college, Miss Lydia. You sure would make a shining star at their clubs and sororities, their midnight lunches, and other frivolities."

"I have thought a great deal about college, but never of those things. Has your sister been to college?"

"No, nor does she care to go. Sis is the dearest girl in all the world, present company excepted. You see, Miss Lydia, Father was country-bred and reared, and he has trained Mollie. Mother was city-bred and she's trained me. She wanted one trained branch of the family-tree and, as Moll absolutely refused to go, I had to be offered up a living sacrifice on the altar of Harvard," laughed the

young man. "By the way, Miss Lydia, you don't seem like any country girl I ever met before, and by Jove, as a harpist, you certainly excel. Do you know, I've changed my mind about the country and have about come to the conclusion that Father's about right. Why, he would near go crazy over Lebanon. Where did your grandparents get the plans for this delightful, rambling, bungalow-fashioned home? It seems quite out of place among these rugged old mountains."

"It was built the last year I was away to school. Grandpa and Grandma have been planning this home for years and, as it came rather late in life, Grandpa would have it built mostly on one floor on account of Grandma. He made several trips to different cities and consulted architects until he found about what he wanted. The steps and balustrade are our own Lebanon granite, quarried from Grandpa's own ledge, and the water-supply is from crystal spring in the hollow, forced up by a ram."

"I must say, I never saw such perfect harmony exist in family life before as I have here. I am almost persuaded to be a farmer myself. When I left school, our family doctor said outdoor life for Roger for a year or two. One of Father's old friends was engineering this right of way for the P. & O., and he induced me to come along. I can't say I like it and should have been gone long ago but for a certain young maiden whose society I very much enjoy and whose voice is melody to me, and do you know, the more I see of her, the deeper my devotion to country life."

Lydia's face was an interesting study. Such conversation was new to her. Aunt Rhue came and

stood in the doorway. Her face grew troubled as she saw the grave look on Lydia's face. She wished in her heart she had not allowed this intimacy to progress, but she trusted Lydia implicitly and returned to her work.

Lydia arose and said: "Pardon me, but I think Grandma wants me. Will you come inside?"

"No, thank you. I will go. I have a book I think you will enjoy and want to ask you to accept it. I am coming to-morrow afternoon to take you for a ride."

"Thank you, but it will be impossible. Uncle and Aunt Phillips are coming to visit us. I have not seen them in ages."

Young Connolly extended his hand, bade her good-by, and was soon gone.

On entering the house, Lydia hunted her grandmother and asked: "How about the wild berries, Grandma? Will you come with me? If you are not too tired, we will go to the edge of the woods in the north pasture. They grow largest there. I have a vagabond desire to ramble to-day. I feel just like I used to when I was a child."

"Hush! When yer wuz er child! Why, Lyddy Wilbur, what air ye now?"

"Come on, Grandma. I long for the woodsey odor and the hum of the busy insects. Well, Rover boy, are you going, too?" and she stooped and patted his head. "If you do, you must carry the basket." Rover obediently opened his mouth for the handle.

That evening Uncle Nat and Aunt Rhue were sitting on the piazza, facing the west. The soft moonlight filtered through the morning glory vines and made a dancing lacey tracery on the floor.

The soft, sweet strains of music from the harp floated through the windows as Lydia idly played. Aunt Rhue sat with hands clasped in her lap, a look of anxiety on her face.

"Air ye feelin' better, Father?" she asked as she hitched her chair alongside of him.

"Yes, I'm all right, now. It is only when the ternal pain pumps so hard that my bellows gets out of order. Er leetle wild cherry bark an' burdock root will set me up all right. Never fear erbout me, Mother."

"Say, Father," and she laid her hand on his arm, "what do yer think erbout that 'ere city feller comin' here so much lately?"

"Now, see here, Mother, yer needn't lose any sleep over him. Lyddy is erbundantly able to take keer of his case when the time comes. Lyddy's er remarkable gal, Mother, an' her contact with the world an' yer teachin's hev already taught her what honor is. That leetle girl hain't to be sneezed at. No, siree, don't ye spend eny time worryin' erbout her, fer she kin hoe her own row an', ef it should git too tejus for her, she knows whar to git assistance. Never fear, Mother, never fear, she'll tell yer when the right time comes. Her leetle heart an' soul hev been er reg'lar battle-field already, an' she knows purty nigh what ammunition to use. The gal must hev some friends outside of us two old people. I think it wuz Cicero who said: 'What sweetness is left in life ef yer take erway friendship?' or somethin' to that effect."

"Good morning, Miss Lydia," said Roger Connolly, as, with extended hand, he approached Lydia,

who was coming from the spring-house with a pitcher of cream. She looked delightfully cool in a dainty, lavender-sprigged print dress. Her sleeves were rolled back to her elbows and neckband was well turned in. The wind had played havoc with her hair, which was kinkier than ever, and a rosy flush overspread her cheeks.

"Good morning, Mr. Connolly," and she shook hands with him. "You are abroad early. Will you come in?"

"No, I thank you. I will rest here."

"I will take the cream to Grandma, who is waiting for it; then I will return."

"Gad, but she's a peach and well worth the picking, regardless of what the Mater would say. She would be an acquisition to any society, and I'll just settle the matter this morning. I hope the old lady will keep indoors to her cooking."

Lydia soon returned, and, smoothing out her dainty white apron, sat down opposite her guest.

"Here is *The Bolton Herald*; came in yesterday, and there's an item I think you'll be somewhat interested in, as it concerns a friend of yours."

He opened the paper and pointed to a paragraph in the society news. Lydia took the paper and read:

"Mr. and Mrs. S. Montgomery, of Springfield, Mass., announce the engagement of their daughter, Elizabeth, to Philip Strong, attorney-at-law and partner of Judge Palmer, at Bolton, Vermont. Mr. Strong is a young man of unusual ability and promises a successful future."

Lydia held the paper with never a muscle's quiver and replied, smiling: "Yes, indeed, Philip Strong is an old friend of mine, and I prize his friendship

dearly. We spent many happy days together on Lebanon, and I wish dear old Philip all the happiness possible. He was the only brother I ever knew."

Roger Connolly sat like a statue. Lydia received the news so differently from what he had expected. Other girls he had known had simply interested him and touched his heart a bit, but it remained for this quiet, unassuming country girl to take complete possession of it. He was willing to confess to her his past and in his mind could see her ready forgiveness, and how she would absolve him from any folly. He would cut out the proposed government position, marry Lydia, and settle down. With her contented companionship, a pair of good saddle-horses, his dogs, his guns, and fishing-tackle, he felt he could be happy, and he made up his mind that he would be worthy of her.

"Yes, I have heard you and Strong were great chums. By the way, why did he drift away from Lebanon?"

"It was ambition that beckoned and he could not resist it," Lydia told him with a smile. "Philip will carve a name for himself. He is one that will reach out and broaden until he will make himself absolutely necessary to his friends."

"You should not pin your faith so implicitly on your friends. They sometimes fail you, forsake you."

"That might prove true of some, but not of Philip, Mr. Connolly. He is dependable. One can always rely on him."

Great presence of mind caused Roger Connolly to change the subject, although he was nettled. "We expect to break camp this week and move far beyond Alden."

"Indeed!" replied Lydia. "How is the work progressing? I thought Alden was to be the terminal."

"So it was intended originally, but the directors have been over the line and think an extension practicable and a good investment. They find a rich territory beyond Alden, much valuable timber and granite there, if a way could be provided to market them. Father says there are millions in the granite alone through this part of the state. But I have found something here far more valuable than granite, Lydia. I love you and want you for my wife." He reached across and laid his hand on hers. "If I will settle down and be a farmer, do you think you could love me well enough to be my wife?"

Lydia's face blanched, then flushed. She did not withdraw her hand. She seemed stunned. Not waiting for an answer, he unwisely began to plead his case.

"The country is the place for me, Miss Lydia. I am a different fellow for being here and knowing you. You see I'm not of much account in town. I sin before I really know it. You can mold me to your liking."

Lydia raised her moist eyes and said: "No, Mr. Connolly, I can not be your wife."

An angry flush mounted his brow. "Why, I would like to know?"

"There are several reasons. First, I do not care for you as I think a woman should for the man she marries. Then, my grandfather is not well, and I could and would not think of such a thing at this time."

"I know the main reason," Connolly said. "It is that fellow, Strong, that blocks my way; but you might as well give him up. He is altogether too

fast for you. City life has spoiled your Lebanon hero; and I tell you again, I am a different fellow since I have known you. I want to settle down. I want a home with you to grace it. I never really knew what a home was until I became acquainted with Lebanon. As for your grandfather, he is fit for fifty years yet; such old codgers live forever."

Lydia looked up startled. He saw her face blanch and her lips quiver. Then straightening up, she said: "Mr. Connolly, please leave me, I pray. You have insulted my love, respect and reverence for both my grandfather and Philip Strong, and have killed with one master stroke any feeling of respect and friendship I ever had for you. Why is there so much uncalled for suffering in the world, I would like to know?"

"Oh, Lydia, forgive me. I was beside myself with love for you. Don't let me drift back, for God's sake don't. Don't dismiss me this way."

"Mr. Connolly, don't press me nor ask me to think this matter over. I am only a plain country girl. Go back to your city home; go back to your city friends. Forget about me and Lebanon. Be a man. Remember, though, that life's best prizes are not won always by those filling fashionable and lofty positions, nor those who stand well in the eyes of the world. 'It is not what we have but what we are that really counts.' It matters little that wealth and distinction are ours, if we neglect the cultivation of true living. My decision is final. I will bid you farewell."

"No, no, Miss Lydia, not farewell. I must see you again. Let bygones be bygones."

"Mr. Connolly, this is farewell."

As he lifted his hat and walked away, he said to himself: "Damn the luck. That confounded Strong is the stumbling-block all right, and the light allusion to her grandad was unfortunate. Gad, but she was regal as she stood there. But never mind, Miss Lydia, I'll have you yet. You certainly are a stunner, a regular princess."

Lydia, after dismissing her suitor, walked around to the kitchen-door and on to the arbor, where she found her grandfather sitting. She went quietly to his side and, passing her arm around his neck, pressed her lips to his forehead. "Dear Grandpa," she said, as she passed on to her room.

Entering, she closed the door and went to the window and, looking toward Old Baldy, murmured: "Dear brother Philip, and so he is engaged to be married. No more delightful visits, no more trips on horseback, no more the looked for home-comings. Oh, Philip, my brother! Come back once more. I need you, oh! I need you."

Like the faint breeze that can not stir the sturdy oak, no refrain came back, and Lydia settled down in the chair and gave up to revery, communed with the past, of bygone days with Philip. She moaned: "Oh, Philip! Where are you? I am weary with waiting. My God, hast thou forsaken me?"

That evening, at supper-time, her grandfather said: "I heard yesterday in Bolton thet Philip Strong hed gone away."

"Where did he go?" asked Lydia.

"How should I know? We hed er disagreement when he wuz here." Lydia was silent. "Philip is too radical in his idees. Thinks he knows more than men twice his age. Says I will make a mistake ef I

take ther offer of ther P. & O. fer ther ledge-lot. Says it will be valuable later on. But money's money ter me, an' it would fit in just right ter build ther new barn on ther Granger farm. He is a queer Dick lately, though good ez gold; but some uv his idees air visionary an' whooly impractical. What does he know about rocks an' granites an' what they'll be worth."

"Why, Grandpa, Philip must know what he is talking about. Don't be in a hurry to sign up with the P. & O."

As he gave no answer, she quietly arose and helped clear away the supper-things. Experience had taught her that it was no time to question further.

As the summer drifted along, the heat seemed to tell on Lydia. She no longer took long walks or rides, but would in leisure moments lie on the bench under the grape-arbor, or idly swing in the stave hammock Philip had made for her. A young neighbor girl assisted Aunt Rhue about the kitchen and dairy. This relieved Lydia and gave her more time for music and the languages, but those days even her loved harp was untouched.

One afternoon, as Lydia and her grandmother were resting on the cool veranda, Lydia drew her little rocker near her grandmother and, laying her hand on the arm of the chair, sat quietly for a time; then, she startled her grandmother by saying: "Grandma, do you believe in love?"

"Why, Lyddy Wilbur, what on airth do yer mean by askin' sech er question? Uv course, I believe in love. Don't I love you, an' don't yer grandpa love ye, an' lots uv other folks love ye?"

"O, yes, Grandma, but I do not mean that kind.

I mean the kind that just blots out everything else, the kind that one would be satisfied with forever if they could have the one they wanted most. I can not explain it as I would, but the kind that makes a heaven here on earth; the kind my mother and father had, the kind that no sacrifice would be too great to make. I have read of it in poetry, in novels, and in the Bible, but I can not understand it. It seems so mysterious, so misleading. Does everybody who marries have to love that way?"

"Wall, Lyddy, they shore ought ter."

"I know they ought to, but do they all really do so? Most of the married people I know do not appear to be so much in love with each other. If they are, they do not show it."

Aunt Rhue said: "See here, Lyddy, what yer drivin' at? Ye jest wait unti' you've hed some experience before yer sum up any conclusions. It is not all in poetry nor story-books thet ye find ther true love. When ye come to hev er leetle more experience, it might change yer mind."

"But, Grandma, do you really believe 'n the love that endures unchangeable, forever, regardless of what happens?"

"Now, see here, Lyddy Wilbur, ye jest stop worryin' erbout sech things. Ther time will come quick ernough when ye'll understand. I must confess, ye air ther queerest an' ther best gal I ever knew."

"Well, I'm just as you have trained me, to come to you with everything I did not understand. So when Roger Connolly told me yesterday he loved me and wanted me for his wife, I was so surprised; and when I told him I did not love him, he was

angry. That is what made me ask you those questions. I had always had the idea that kindness and sympathy and mutual understanding, and a desire to shield and protect and help, were synonyms of love."

"Ye air right, dear, so they air. What is love more than harmony an' peace, uv all things divine er human, uv God er man? I tell yer, our happiness in this life depends largely on our love fer our fellow man, an' on ourselves ruther than on our surroundings an' our bank-accounts; an' when we hev er heart at peace with ther world an' our Maker, I call that love; but, child, yer definition is all right, an' don't, fer pity sake, let anything thet air city chap hez said disturb yer feelin's."

"But, Grandma, I am so disappointed in him. I had thought of him only as a good friend."

"Wall, child, thar's plenty uv disappointments an' sorrows an' often friends, like books, fail yer when yer begin ter find them ther most interestin'; but don't brood an' narrer down, ner be biased by any sech nonsense. Jest consider it er grist come ter yer mill, jest sift it all out, keep ther good grain, an' throw away ther chaff. Sech experiences only winnow ther gold frum ther dross. Ye jest chirk up. Them air hollyhocks an' asters needs er leetle attention. Ther scissors air on ther candle-stand. A leetle work will do yer good an' it is er pure an' noble thing. Jest git near ter natur', child. It'll fill in ther chinks with sweet memories. Read some uv yer good books, them thet's filled with noble sentiment, an' cultivate the grand nature God hez give ye an' in so doin', never fergit thet ther mind is uv more consequence than ther body. Ye can

dress up ther body in fine raiment er sackcloth, an' arter yer done with it, jest fling it erside an' thet's an end ter it.

"Ye sow er habit, ye reap er character. 'Ye sow a character, ye reap a destiny.' I don't know who ther feller is who writ them lines, but he wuz in harmony with my way uv thinkin'. Ez I said, ther mind is uv more importance than ther body ter bring happiness an' ther soul is more than both.

"Jest close yer eyes ter all thet city chap said ter ye an' be yer own happy self erg'in. Ye know, Lyddy, our lives air er kind uv tapestry an' it's ther hand uv God erlone, child, thet weaves ther pattern. Ther woof is not always bright, especially in noble lives er lives thet count, ez I told yer once before. Ther who'e web is generally hit an' miss. Disappointments like yours seem like afflictions sometimes, but it's er leetle dark stripe ter better bring out ther brightness thet we may best do ther work God hez planned. I tell ye it's ther leetle silent victories thet air ther threads uv gold thet gleam out so bright in ther web uv life. Some patterns air more difficult because they air so mixed, but ther stripes uv brightness air ther ones God approves of. Don't worry any more, child. What do ye s'pose is ther reason Philip Strong don't write er come home?"

"I have wondered about that myself, Grandma."

Aunt Rhue rose and said: "Lydia, do ye want yer grandpa ter head off thet city chap. Ef ye do, jest say ther word; he kin settle his comin' here in er minnit."

"Thank you, Grandma. I don't mind his com-

ing, now that the matter is settled. He is pleasant company, but I could never marry him, no, never."

"Wall, thank heaven fer thet," said Aunt Rhue, as she left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

When Philip Strong returned from Washington, a month later, it was near midnight. On his office-table, among some other mail, was a letter from Aunt Rhue, telling him of Lydia's serious illness, of how, in her delirium she talked to him, of the old days when they were happy on Lebanon, and of how he had forgotten her, and she wound up by saying: "Philip Strong, ef ye hev any mercy on me, fer heaven's sake, come ter Lebanon."

Philip settled down in his chair and reread the letter. Tired nature soon held him in slumber. Outside, the first early trace of daylight deepened. Still, Philip slept on, the sleep of utter exhaustion. The lamp had burned out and only a pile of gray ashes lay on the hearth. The clatter of horses' feet on the pavement at last aroused him. He straightened up with a start, rubbed his eyes and arose, picked up and reread Aunt Rhue's letter, went over to the window and, drawing the shade, looked out.

"I must hasten on my way. Mother! Mother always taught that the one thing she always depended on was prayer." For the first time in years, Philip dropped to the floor and, covering his face,

said: "Oh, God! Mother's God. Spare Lydia until I get there and help me to trust Thee in all things."

Philip hastily bathed and changed his clothes, ate a light breakfast, left word at his office that he had gone to Lebanon, went to the stable and, without a word, threw the saddle on, hastily mounted and rode off. The hours dragged along until noon. Finally, he drew up to a wayside tavern, halted, dismounted, and threw the reins to the hostler boy with an order to rub down, feed well, and have him saddled and at the door in a couple of hours. Entering the low bar or lounging-room, he ordered a light lunch. In due time, he was in the saddle again and, by taking bridle-paths and crosscuts, made good time. The hours grew longer and before long lengthened themselves into twilight. Still, Philip rode on. A profound silence seemed to reign about him; noises pitched to an unusual degree of softness added to the lonely ride; and an occasional discordant cry from the depths of the forest would reach him. Sweet memories flashed to him as he drew near dear old Lebanon, only to be driven back by the thought of Lydia's serious illness.

Aunt Rhue met him with a hug and, if a few tears fell on Philip's cheek, he took no time to brush them away. After greeting Aunt Rhue, he went immediately into the room where Lydia lay. The subdued murmur of delirium caused him to shiver as with ague. He stood with folded arms at the foot of the bed.

Aunt Rhue bent over the sufferer and said: "Lyddy, dear, Philip is here. Can't ye speak ter him."

Slowly, the large eyes opened, then closed again.

"Philip," she murmured, and then the unintelligible talk of delirium filled the room. Aunt Rhue motioned to Philip and they left the room together.

"Aunt Rhue, will you tell me just how long Lydia has been sick, and what does the doctor say about her illness. We must have council at once. I will telegraph to Boston for the best diagnostician to come at once."

"Tut, tut, Philip, we don't need none uv yer Boston specialists. They kin do no more than hez been done by ther Alderson an' Bolton doctors; besides, our old Doctor Wilbeforce knows er bit more'n some uv yer new-fangled specialists. He says brain-fever must run its course an' thet, when ther crisis comes, we must work like God Almighty ter save her. I told him he'd better say ter work 'with God Almighty,' fer He erlone kin save her."

"My God!" groaned Philip.

"Now, see here, Philip," said Aunt Rhue, laying her hand on Philip's shoulder. "I know more erbout Lyddy's ravin's than any one else an' I believe you kin do more fer her than all ther specialists in Montpelier er Boston. Philip, it's yer she wants. Kin ye stay er day er two?"

Philip laid his hand on Aunt Rhue's and said: "I can never thank you nor express how grateful I am. I will stay forever if necessary. You must be relieved and rest. I will watch over and care for Lydia at night. Who is this woman that is helping care for her?"

"She's frum Bolton, a cousin of Miss Snow. She's a good, faithful, close-mouthed woman. She calls herself a practical nurse an' ther doctor says she's worth half a dozen white-capped, starched-up

young nurses who fuss all ther time. I want ter tell yer, Philip, she's all right in er case like this. Ye kin trust her ter ther limit."

"When will the doctor come again?"

"Erbout nine erclock. He is out Baldy way an'll stop on his way back; but come, my boy, an' hev yer supper."

Philip stepped outside the kitchen-door and ran into Uncle Nat, who, with outstretched hands, said: "Welcome home, Philip. Ye an' I must be friends. I wuz an old fool ter erlow myself ter say what I did ter ye last spring. Ye were right, Philip, erbout ther granite. I'll acknowledge it, an' I'm mighty glad ye put ther spurs inter me erbout sellin' it fer er song."

"It's all right, Uncle Nat, but it hurt when you said I had better attend to my own business and not meddle with yours; so I have tried to. But the thing that cut and cut deep was when you sent Trix back because I wouldn't accept money for her. Uncle Nat, I raised and broke Trixy to saddle on purpose for Lydia. For five years, I groomed and petted and broke to side-saddle that horse for her. I even wore petticoats in breaking her that I might be sure she would be safe for Lydia to ride. No one but Lydia and myself has ever ridden her, and, if Lydia should not recover, no human being shall ever ride her again. Trix was to have been a birthday present for her, but you made it impossible. I am here not at your invitation, but because Lydia is sick," and Philip walked into the house.

"Mighty high-spirited is thet Philip Strong, an' er likely young feller he is, to. But he can't boss me on Lebanon. No, siree, I'll hev no hoss fer

Lyddy but what I'll pay fer. Philip can't afford ter give erway er colt like Trix. Why thet air animal is worth two hundred dollars ef she's worth er cent."

Philip met the doctor and conversed about the case from the very beginning and inquired anxiously about the crisis and when it would likely be. The doctor said probably within the next twenty-four hours. Then, he proceeded to tell Philip just what to do, all the remedies necessary, of the ears of corn to be boiled and kept in hot water to be wrapped in cloths and placed around her to husband the last spark of vitality, of the ready stimulant to be administered at the right moment, of the hot beef or chicken broth, and of the extreme exhaustion that would follow, and of the perfect quiet so necessary—but not one word of her probable recovery.

After the doctor left, Philip told Aunt Rhue that he would lie down and take the much needed rest. He did not want to trust himself for a twenty-four hour vigil without it. "Have everything in readiness and call me at twelve o'clock; then you must retire." He left the kitchen, and, throwing himself on the lounge, was soon sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Exactly at twelve o'clock, Aunt Rhue touched Philip. Instantly, he was on his feet and, after inquiring about Lydia, went outside the kitchen to the water tap and bathed his face and hands in the cool, refreshing, spring water of Lebanon.

Aunt Rhue had prepared a substantial lunch, which he hastily partook of; then he carefully looked over everything necessary for the great crisis — the crisis that meant so much to them all —

saw that even the boiler of ears of hot corn was all right; that the kettle was filled for emergency use; that the brandy and even the broth, rich and nourishing, were in evidence. Then, he saw to it that Aunt Rhue and Uncle Nat were resting, and, entering Lydia's room, motioned the nurse away, after telling her to rest until he should call her. Then, settling himself beside Lydia, he took up his long vigil.

Her delirium had given place to a stillness that was appalling. The fever closed around her in a jealous flame as though afraid it might be robbed of its prey, and Lydia, her form like marble, except for the glowing crimson spots on either cheek, was oblivious to the world. At times, it seemed almost as though her spirit had fled. Suspended animation reigned supreme. All night and all the next day and well on to midnight, did the supreme presence seem manifest with scales at even balance, waiting.

Philip kept silent watch. He spoke no word, but his haggard face well told his anxiety and mental suffering. At two o'clock that morning, he heard the doctor's gig drive up quietly into the yard. The faint glow of the shaded candle fell on the bed. Philip arose, straightened up, and tried to marshal some of his departed forces in order to meet the doctor.

The doctor on coming in, passed without a word directly to the bedside, watch in hand, and silently gazed at Lydia. Putting his finger on the artery, he gravely counted the fluttering heart-beats. As he left the bedside, Philip whispered:

"You expect the change soon?"

The doctor nodded his head.

"You will remain here the rest of the night?" The doctor again nodded his head.

"Has she any chance?"

"I don't know. A very unusual case this. The crisis should have come hours ago; but every one has a fighting chance until life is extinct," and he passed from the room.

As the door closed, Philip crossed to the window and looked out into the inky darkness. "Mother, where is the God to whom you used to pray? Is He near us in this our great extremity? O, God, I beg that You hear this night, and if in Thy great wisdom, it seemeth best, save Oh, save this precious one."

At last, he sat down again by the bed, and, dropping his head in his hands, sighed for the gift of tears. He felt that he was paying the price of neglected opportunities. He felt like some antagonized animal, too weak to fight against a dread enemy alone, and this dread enemy, death.

The hours crept on. Philip, kneeling by the bed and holding one of Lydia's hands, bowed his head and prayed. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead as he murmured: "God, direct our feeble effort in administering the remedies aright. Spare, Oh, spare this precious one. Aid us in this fight against death. Spare her long enough at least that I may prove my love and devotion."

Occasionally, Aunt Rhue, the nurse, or Uncle Nat would tiptoe to the door and peep in, only to retire from Philip and his Gethsemane.

At last, the crisis had come. All was confusion. Hurrying footsteps brought to the doctor and Philip all they had been instructed to bring at a given

signal. Anxious faces watched every breath. Minutes seemed hours. Dawn began to approach, and, as the sun crept over Old Baldy and threw a faint ray of light over Lydia's bed, there was a faint flutter of the eye-lids. Slowly, her eyes opened. A faint smile wreathed her lips. The doctor touched Aunt Rhue and put his finger to his lips and left the room.

Death had been outwitted. The power of love had conquered and Lydia would live.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The fever had left Lydia, after consuming nearly every particle of her vitality, but the doctor said, with a sly wink, that with good care, she would come around and be worth half a dozen dead girls. Everybody was relieved. It had been a terrible ordeal. For days, Philip watched and waited on Lydia until all danger had passed. Then, he told them that he must return to Bolton and finish some important business his uncle had entrusted to his care, but that he would return at the earliest period possible. But to Aunt Rhue, he said:

"Let me know if Lydia asks for me, and I will come at once."

But Lydia never asked for him to come back. The little clipping from *The Springfield Record* that Roger Connolly had brought had kept her from it. For many days after Philip left, Lydia lay prostrated from the ravages made by the brain-fever.

She was too fatigued and worn to care or think and could not clearly remember the incidents that led to her illness. She knew naught of how Philip and the rest had worked over her.

The loyalty of Philip's unspoken love that had through years of waiting been kept at bay was now poured out in silent thanksgiving, as he slowly rode out of sight of Lebanon and Lydia. No, he would take no advantage of her weak condition. He would give her plenty of time to analyze her heart. She must not be excited or worried. It was hard to leave, but he felt the necessity of returning and well knew how the office-work had piled up during his ten days' absence.

Day followed day, and still Philip watched and waited for some word that would call him back to Lebanon. Several times, he went to Alderson to see Si Newman and inquire about Lydia. She was slowly gaining, but very weak. For the first time in his life, Philip was at a loss to know just what to do; and on Lebanon, Lydia, like Philip, waited. Day by day, she would watch for the coming of Uncle Si and the Overland in hope for some message or the coming of Philip, but no word did she speak. Dreary days dragged by. The only break in the monotony, aside from the kindly neighbors' calls and Si Newman's semi-weekly visits, was Roger Connolly. An occasional magazine found its way from Philadelphia and her grandmother's letters were full of solicitude for Lydia's recovery; and so both Lydia and Philip waited. Unconsciously and without design on their part, they drifted and drifted farther apart.

Out into the great, homey kitchen, they carried

her and laid her on the roomy lounge by the window where the warm sunshine poured in. She rarely spoke or moved and, except for the yearning look in her large brown eyes, seemed immune from everything about her. The nurse hovered about her and Aunt Rhue was lovingly solicitous for her comfort, but all to no avail.

In this exhausted state of her convalescence, her soul seemed sealed. She was conscious of her weakness, yet did not try to overcome it. Time passed on; the mist of exhaustion that had seemed to envelop her slowly dissipated, and Lydia asked to be taken out of doors. With Aunt Rhue's assistance, the nurse carried her from her couch by the window to an easy chair on the piazza, where she would be bathed in the soft sunshine that filtered through the vines. She asked that they leave her and, when alone, wept for the first time, wept for the seeming neglect of Philip and the great sacrament of love that had been denied her. She shivered, drew the light shawl about her, dropped her head in her hands, and uttered silently one heart-agonized cry to the mother that had been denied her:

"Oh, Mother, so safe, so secure, take me, oh, take me!"

"I fear I startled you," said the pleasant voice of Roger Connolly. "I never dreamed of finding you out of doors, but it's jolly fine, Miss Lydia, and a pleasant surprise. As I climbed the hill road this afternoon, I wondered how much longer it would be before I could take you for a ride."

"O, thank you, but that is not to be thought of for a long, long time yet. Not until I am quite strong again."

The spell of the gentle, late summer warmth, with its invigorating gentle breeze lifted and played with her kinky hair, and a faint blush crept into her marble-like countenance, that made her look like the old Lydia again. Connolly took a seat near her and, tossing his Panama on the floor, asked:

"Will it tire you if I sit and rest a while by you?"

"Not at all; you are welcome."

This simple though dignified answer touched a strange chord in his heart. They talked of various pleasant subjects until Aunt Rhue came to help Lydia into the house.

For a week, Lydia was helped to the piazza. One day, she slowly descended the steps and walked on to the flower-garden. As she came to the bench Philip had made for her so long ago, a flood of tender memories rushed over her. Wearily, she sat down and a cry escaped her: "Oh, Philip, my brother, where are you?"

After this, her recovery was more rapid. The magnificent autumn weather made this period of her convalescence less tiresome. Her Grandmother Filmore was making her annual visit and would leave on the morrow, and had tried hard to induce Lydia to accompany her and stop at some watering place to fully recuperate, but Lydia did not feel equal to it.

Mrs. Filmore told Lydia that her grandnephew, Horace Van de Water, would meet her in Boston and be her companion on to Philadelphia.

Lydia said but little. Finally, Aunt Rhue, after considering the situation, said: "Mrs. Filmore, don't ye think Lyddy is erbout old ernuf ter decide purty

near what she wants ter do. Ther child is ez weak ez er rag yet. Better not pester her too much at present, long ez she is happy; an' ez fer society an' fashion, what does it ermount ter compared ter Lyddy's health. Fer my part," she continued, sharply, "I think it's all fol de rol, any way, an' hez purty nigh killed Lyddy ez it is."

"Sister Wilbur, did it ever occur to thee that thee was robbing thy grandchild of her rightful social advantages by influencing her to remain on Lebanon? It is high time Lydia was thinking about a husband and a home of her own."

"Tut, tut, Mrs. Filmore, Lyddy is only er child yit. It would be cruel, even barbarous ter suggest sech er thing. My idee is fer her ter live quiet like on Lebanon till she is perfectly well, then she kin cut an' choose fer herself. This 'ere rushin' young girls inter society an' throwin' 'em at every eligible man in sight is, ter my way uv thinkin', er wicked thing. More lives air ruined than made happy. Broken hearts air not easily mended an' er bird with er broken pinion could never soar so high erg'in. Yer see, ma'am, it's better to explain both sides uv this question ter Lyddy."

"Thou art going to extremes, Sister Wilbur; I know of nothing to explain."

"That is ther way with plenty uv mothers, ma'am, but don't yer think often 'an ounce uv explanation an' love towards our children sometimes is better than er whole pound uv repentance an' forgiveness when it's too late?' Fer my part, I believe in human kindness an' that we too often fergit it. We git so busy in our plans an' specifications that we air apt ter leave out ther sheet-anchor. An' ter

be plain with yer, ma'am, I believe ther beauty uv sunsets an' mountains, an' music uv birds an' brooks, is what Lyddy needs at present more than art-galleries an' concerts, fashion an' dress. Not but what they air all right in the proper place an' time."

Mrs. Filmore adroitly turned the conversation, but she thought to herself: "Just wait, Sister Wilbur, until I get my granddaughter again, and thy persuasions will avail thee nothing."

At the same time, as Aunt Rhue went about her work, she murmured to herself: "No, no, too much excitement now might jest kill our leetle gal. We'll try an' keep her here until she is well an' then she shall go ef she wants ter. God forbid thet Father er I would hinder her, but what she needs now is Lebanon. I think er leetle light work will be ther best medicine fer her mind, an' fresh air an' refreshin' sleep, with Brindle's cream an' fresh milk — that will be ther best panacea fer her frail body; an' we'll sandwich in er leetle good comradeship uv Rover an' ther bees an' shady nooks an' her harp-music. Thet's what Lyddy needs. An' when she's well, she shall have her own way. If it is ther city, well an' good; but ef it's Lebanon, all ther thees an' thou's could go ter grass an' eat mullien."

Days slipped into weeks and there was little to disturb the peaceful quiet on Lebanon. Lydia rejoiced in the rich autumn and enjoyed the rare pleasure of roaming at will. The frost had spared her rich treasures of fern and flower deep down in silver beech hollow. Her strength had returned sufficiently that she was able to take her loved walks and occasionally she walked on to the woods

back of the south pasture where the tinkle, tankle of Brindle's bell kept the dairy herd together.

Uncle Nat grew weaker daily and this increased the anxiety of both Aunt Rhue and Lydia. They seldom left Lebanon and entertained only the old friends and neighbors who, in passing, stopped over a few hours to refresh and rest themselves and team, before proceeding on their journey. Uncle Peter Phillips and Aunt Nabby came occasionally and, during Lydia's illness and convalescence, her old friend, Lillian St. Clair St. Alban would drive over in Squire Granger's old carryall and bring the babies. At such visits, Lydia was happy.

One day, in glancing around Lydia's room, she started up quickly and, putting her baby on the couch by Lydia, crossed the room and stood with clasped hands before the tiny ivory portrait of Lydia's mother. Breathless, she stood in surprise and admiration; then, turning, asked Lydia who it was.

"That is my mother's picture, given me at my graduation."

Mrs. St. Alban commented on her beauty but said nothing, but when she left to go home, Aunt Rhue accompanied her to the gate. Then, with sun-bonnet well pushed back and folded arms, Aunt Rhue leaned on the gate and told her all — of the coming of Lydia's mother and of the letter of explanation.

"God be praised!" said Mrs. St. Alban. "Tell Lydia her mother was my dearest girl friend, and I am the one mentioned in the letter. We were married at the same time. Strange, I never connected your name with Margaret's husband's, but

there has been so much to distract one. I am sincerely glad that Lydia is the daughter of my precious friend whom I loved and have mourned for years."

"Wall, ye surprise me, Mrs. St. Alban, an' we'll talk this over erg'in an' Lyddy will be delighted. Ther Lord is surely good. It seems thar's allus somethin' ter be thankful fer an' uv all things ther best is thet Lyddy's been spared ter us. Did ye ever hear uv thet leetle verse thet carries so much comfort an' peace ter people in sorrow an' trouble. It's somethin' like this:

" 'We can not allus understand ther Master's rule,
We can not allus do ther tasks in life's hard school,
But we can trust, an' with His help ter do them
one by one,
An' when we can not understand ter say, "Thy
will be done." ' ' "

"That is beautiful, Mrs. Wilbur, and so true."

"Yes, it's ther hull thing in er nutshell, child. We can allus trust, but it's mighty hard ter allus be able ter say, 'Father, Thy will be done,' an' mean it. But Lyddy's allus been er comfort ter us frum ther day she come ter us er leetle helpless innercent babe. Yes, ma'am, er real comfort."

As the carryall rolled away, Mrs. St. Alban waved to her from the back.

"Likely woman," said Aunt Rhue, as she returned to the house, "but did ye ever! Wonders never cease. Wall, our boy was in good company any way." A tear dropped on Lydia's cheek as Aunt Rhue stooped and smoothed her hair and told her of Mrs. St. Alban's story.

"Oh, Grandma! How good God is after all," and

Lydia, lying there so fragile in her white purity of soul and body, thanked God from whom all blessings flow.

CHAPTER XXX.

About this time, Uncle Nat gave up entirely. His weakness increased, and he would sit by the hour and read or listen to Lydia. He had so blazed the trail on the farm that the work went on successfully, for Jake, who had shared his labors for years, reigned supreme as head man.

Lydia would talk over plans with her grandparents and then, in her quiet, gracious way, would impart them to Jake, who in turn would carry out instructions and hire extra help as needed. And still Philip did not come.

Grandmother Filmore was getting impatient for Lydia's visit, but nothing would tempt her to leave Lebanon now.

One evening, after Uncle Nat's sudden illness that left his right side partially paralyzed, Si Newman dropped in to inquire about him. They were all in the large living-room, adjoining the room where Uncle Nat was lying. Lydia, to-night, took no part in the conversation, but sat quietly in her rocker near her grandmother. Slowly, she arose and entered the room where her grandfather was, then as slowly returned and crossed the room, sat down in an abstracted manner to her harp. Running her fingers lightly over the strings, she brought forth

a sweet, low tone, almost human in tenderness. After playing a while, she arose with a quiver, drew the cover over her harp even as a mother would lovingly cover her child, and passed from the room.

This was too much for Si Newman. He soon picked up his hat, and with his genial "good night, all," went out. As he mounted the old sorrel mare, he said:

"Gosh all fish-hooks, hellfire an' brimstun Things on Leb'non air all criss-cross. Thunder's ter pay somewhar er some how. Fer there's some-thin' jest er gnawin' right inter Lyddy's heart, pore leetle gal! I've a good mind ter ask her erbout thet Roger Connolly. Seems like er likely chap, but yer kin never tell erbout these 'ere city chaps. Ef he's foolin' round Lyddy an' pesterin' her, by gosh, down goes his house, an' in goes his winder. She's ez good ez Californy gold, an' I'll stand by her, by gum, through thick an' thin. It erbout made me cave in ter see Uncle Nat's big, bright eyes foller every move she made, an' him so helpless.

"Then, thet air music she makes, wall, it erbout makes yer think uv yer heavenly home. By gosh, ev'ry time she plays lately, there's er lump comes up in my throat ez big ez Eben Guy's Adam's apple, an' nigh erbout shets off my wind. Hain't hed thet same feelin' before since Mother died. Git up, Nell, thar's ther bull's eye frum ther Traveler's Rest, glimmin' like er star through ther trees. I wonder whar in thunder thet Philip Strong is, traipsin' eround ther country when he's needed ter home. Strange chap that Philip is."

The next morning, as Si Newman passed the Wilburs, he said to himself: "I'll be goldarned ef I

don't jest go on ter Bolton an' see ef thet Philip Strong hez got hum. He's needed on Leb'non ef ever he wuz; Uncle Nat so sick, Aunt Rhue all tired out, an' worried erbout ter death, an' Lyddy lookin' like er ghost an' no more strength than er peewee. An' thet city chap er traipsin' up thar every whip-stitch er tanterlizin' her, an' I know it. Wan't fer little Jersey Grey an' faithful Jake Danvers, I dunno what would become uv ther Wilburs, by gum, I don't. Money don't buy happiness.

"Gad, it's too tarnal bad, jest ez they'd got ev'ry danged thing so convenient an' citified like. Thar's ther new house an' new-fangled runnin' water-gear ter turn on an' off, an' thet air big tin, coffin-shaped tub ter take er bath in, an' them big piazzas an' granite steps an' some kind uv er rambunctious concern ter ram ther water frum crystal spring up ter ther house, an' er dozen other things ter make 'em comfortable an' happy.

"I've often ruminated why in thunder Phil Strong hez left Lyddy an' ther rest ter drift like er boat without er rudder. Thar's somethin' crooked, by gosh, an' Si Newman'll move heaven an' airth ter riddle out this 'ere pesky snarl. I'm sartin sure it hain't like Phil ter shirk like this in time uv trouble."

"Hello, Phil! How air ye?"

"Why, Uncle Si, how glad I am to see you," and Philip Strong left his desk and went quickly to meet Si Newman, with eager, outstretched hand. "This is a glad surprise. How are you? Come into my private office. Pardon me, Mr. Early, this is an old and valued friend from Mt. Lebanon. I will return shortly."

"All right, Strong, my business is not pressing. I'll drop in again."

When they had entered the private office, Philip again took Si's hand. "Well, Uncle Si, how are you and every one on dear old Lebanon, Aunt Rhue and Uncle Nat and Lydia and everybody and everything?"

"Tut, tut, Philip, don't go quite so fast. We'll hev ter take things in sections like, I reckon," and he hung his left leg over the right and pulled his beard in easy strokes. After a moment's silence, he looked up and continued: "I'll be goldarned, Phil Strong, ef I orter tell ye er blasted bit uv news. Why in thunder hain't ye been up ter see fer yerself?"

"Business, Uncle Si, business. Then, I have been away for six weeks on business for the firm and have only been home a couple of days."

"Wall, Philip, I guess I'll hev ter fergive yer this time, an' I'll begin on ther head uv ther family, Uncle Nat. Ye know Lyddy's sickness wuz er terrible shock ter Uncle Nat; fer she is ther apple uv his eye. Wall, he hain't been very strong since, jest er failin' gradual-like, an', last Saturday week, he hed er stroke. His right side is paralyzed an' ther doctor says another is liable ter come any time. Yer kin imagine erbout how Aunt Rhue is er holdin' on. She's er wonder, she is, but she's er failin' all right.

"Ez fer Lyddy, she's only er shadder, but loyal an' true ter her old grandparents, smoothin' out ther hard places an' hummin' eround like er bee, day an' night. She tends her grandpa jest ez patient ez er lamb, an' never er murmur out uv her.

"I wuz er talkin' ter her ther other night, an' when I offered ter stay an' sit up with her, she sez so pitiful-like: 'No, thank ye, Uncle Si, but I prefer ter do it. You know how good Grandpa hez allus been ter me; but I thank yer an' appreciate it very much.' Then a tear rolled down her cheek an' she said: 'Uncle Si, don't ye think it's better ter do fer ther livin'?' An' I sez, 'Lyddy, I do.' Then she said: 'O, Uncle Si, ef any uv my friends hev any tender thoughts er sympathy fer me laid away ter utter over my lifeless body, I'd rather they'd express them now, Uncle Si, like you, that I might be cheered by 'em while I'm erlive an need 'em.' Then she said somethin' erbout er plain coffin without er flower, an' er funeral without er eulogy, than er life without the sweetness uv love an' sympathy, an' er lot uv other stuff erbout how she'd ruther hev her one leetle lilac posy er marigold while she wuz erlive ter enjoy it, than er bushel uv hothouse posies when she wuz dead, er some tarnal thing like it, I disremember jest how she did say it. But ye kin draw yer own conclusions an' imagine jest erbout how she feels. Pore leetle gal, she's so thin an' white, she fairly totters when she walks, but I must be goin'. I hev ter ketch ther train ter Alderson at 12:20, an' I want ter git er posy uv some kind fer her ter chirk her up a leetle."

Philip sat white-faced and deeply concerned.

"Any word ye'd like me ter take ter Leb'non, Philip?"

"Yes, Uncle Si. Give them all my fondest love. Tell them I have just returned from Washington and Baltimore, and that I knew nothing of Uncle Nat's illness; also, tell them I will see them soon.

Good-by, Uncle Si," wringing his hand, "I thank you for looking me up. But I wish you would go to dinner with me."

"Can't do it, Philip. I must ketch thet train. Ye see I hed er little business thet called me Bolton way, so I thought I'd look yer up. Good-by, Philip, an' good luck."

As Si strode along the street to the station, he muttered: "I guess I put er shot in his locker thet time. Of course, I had business Bolton way, er I'd not be here but God fergive me fer lyin' erbout what Lyddy said. Stern cases need stern handlin' an I'll bet er tin dollar thet I've give Phil Strong somethin' ter digest. Ther very devil's ter pay somewhar, I'm sartin sure. Never saw er man git so chalky white before, but it sarves him right. Now the first chance I hev, I'll sock it ter thet city chap."

As luck would have it, as Si was on the home-stretch from Alderson, he overtook Roger Connolly and offered him a lift. Young Connolly willingly accepted and swung himself up beside the stage driver. After discussing various subjects, Si shifted his quid, squinted one eye, and said:

"See here, young man, I want ter ask yer er question. How's Miss Wilbur terday?"

"Very well, very well, indeed."

"Seems ter me ye must find it interestin' like at Nat Wilbur's er ye wouldn't travel this 'ere hill-road quite so often."

"Yes, I must confess I do. I certainly enjoy an occasional visit with Miss Lydia; but I can't see that it is any concern of yours where I go or what I do."

"Wall, my young friend, don't fly off ther handle thet way er ye might regret it; but there's one thing I want yer ter know an' thet is thet ye're on ther wrong track ef ye think fer er single minnit thet Si Newman's goin' ter stand back an' see er young chap like ye harass er leetle helpless gal like Lyddy thet hez er dyin' grandfather, so ter speak, on her hands an' er heart full uv worry an' anxiety over it, yer mistaken."

"Well, I would like to know what it is to you. I rather think I will continue to visit Miss Lydia whenever I choose as long as she doesn't object."

"Now, see 'ere, young man, yer want ter know what it is ter me, do ye? Wall, I'll jest inform ye er leetle on thet subject. First, frum an honorable point uv view, fer she is er leetle, innercent body with not much pertection at present except her Uncle Si. An' now I'll explain er leetle more. Ye see, I cain't shoot wuth er tin dollar, but I jest might accident'ly happen ter kill er little squirrel er a groundhog er a great big somethin' thet carries eround er carkiss thet he calls er man. Wall, I most ginerally win er die in ther fracas an' ye kin see fer yerself I'm quite much erlive. All I want ez fer ye ter mind yer P's an' Q's an' ef ye don't, Si Newman'll be ready fer yer."

At this, Si stopped his horses and young Connolly jumped down. As he disappeared around a bend in the road, Si exclaimed:

"Gosh all fish-hooks, but I'm jest itchin' ter git er grip on thet air chap. Yet, arter all, he seems like er likely sort uv feller. But he's got his eddication concernin' Si Newman, all right. I know one thing, our Lyddy hain't got much use fer him."

Why, ef he made er proposal ter her, she'd drop him quicker'n er hot pertater. But any one, with half an eye, kin see he's blind, stavin' crazy in love with her; but he'd better watch out."

CHAPTER XXXI.

The day after Si Newman's visit to Bolton, Philip started by train to Alderson, thence by horseback, as the quickest way, to Lebanon. After tying his horse, he stepped quickly to the kitchen-door and found Aunt Rhue busily sealing some peach preserves. She dropped everything and, advancing, threw her arms around Philip with a glad cry:

"Oh, Philip, my boy! I wuz sure ye would come ef ye knew Father wuz sick."

"You are right, Aunt Rhue. But how are you and Lydia?"

"I'm all right, Philip, but Lyddy might be better. She's erbout tired out, but never complains."

"Can I see Uncle Nat?"

"Wall, Philip, I'll tell yer ther truth. He hed er bad night, but is ersleep now. I'll tiptoe in an', ef he's erwake, I'll call ye."

Aunt Rhue returned and said: "He's sleepin' like er baby. Best not disturb him, hed we?"

"No, no, under no consideration. I can wait."

"Wall, Philip, ez I wuz sayin', Lyddy's thet devoted ter her grandpa, she's erbout wore ter a shadder. She waits on him, she reads ter him by ther hour. She's hed her harp moved into ther

livin'-room an' frequently plays him ter sleep. Sometimes, in ther middle uv ther night, ye can hear her playin' thet soft, murmurin' kind uv music — seems more like angel's than er mortal touch. Et sort uv quiets him when nothin' else will."

"Where is Lydia?"

"She's jest gone down ter crystal spring, Philip. Thar's er leetle hitch somewhar in ther machinery thet sends ther water up ter ther house. She said she would investigate 'fore sendin' ter Alderson fer er mechanic. She's ez handy with er monkey-wrench ez she is with her harp-strings. She's sort uv out er tune herself. She took er book erlong this afternoon an', if I need her, I'll toot ther dinner-horn. I'm all through now, Philip. Come out on ther piazza. Josey will clear away my muss an' tidy up ther kitchen."

"Thank you, Aunt Rhue, but I will walk on down to Crystal Spring and return with Lydia."

Philip was concerned about Lydia. Loving hearts had exaggerated about her condition until he was nearly frantic. He went around the north side of the house and struck a bee-line for Crystal Spring. Crossing the road, he struck the old familiar orchard-path and went on and on. A rising breeze stirred the apple boughs above, and shadows sifted through their tilted branches. Mechanically, he walked along through the silvery orchard grass. The hum of myriads of bees and other insect life, the slanting rays of sun on the fruit-laden trees, the fragrance of wild flowers, the lowing of the cattle on distant hill, the cheep, cheep of near-by crickets—all were lost on Philip. He was so absorbed in deep thought,

agonized for the suffering of those he loved, and wondering what he could do to smooth out the rough places.

"I will do the best I can. She shall never suffer one instant through me, but how can I ever see her throw herself away on that aimless cad. Perhaps I can lighten her burden in some way or be a comfort. I can be a brother and stand shoulder to shoulder with her to the end."

As he entered Silver Beech Hollow, in the distance he saw Lydia, sitting on a rock, her elbow on her knee and her chin resting in the hollow of her hand. Old Rover was lying at her feet, an open book lay in her lap, but she was not reading. She sat staring into the farther deep woods. A simple dress of light, clinging material, trimmed with tiny bows of pale green ribbon, was vastly becoming. The wind had tousled her hair until it was bewitching, and that deep, far-away look in her eyes added to the expression. Her face was as colorless as marble except the cherry-red lips.

The snapping of a twig caused Rover to rouse. This attracted Lydia's attention and Philip stopped short. Then, hastening toward her with a cry of gladness, he dropped on the ground at her feet and caught her hands in his,

"Oh, Lydia, my sister, my old sweetheart of by-gone days!"

Lydia was dazed at the sudden appearance of Philip.

"Lydia," he cried, "speak one word of welcome. For God's sake, tell me you are glad to see me."

Lydia smiled a wee, sad smile. "You are long in coming, brother."

Philip quickly released her hand. "Forgive me, Lydia. I have no desire to thrust my presence on you; but you are such a dream of loveliness I could bow down and worship you, my precious sister, my Lebanon queen."

She raised her hand and said: "Don't, Philip, don't, I beg of you. Please don't add unloyalty to another to the crime of neglecting your old friends."

"Lydia! I do not understand what you mean, but I can bear it no longer. You must listen, even though you do belong to another, I will tell you of my love, then I will go away. I will never thrust my presence on you again, but, oh! I love you so, my peerless treasure; I love you so."

Lydia sat as one dazed.

"I call God for witness," said Philip, "that I did not mean to betray my feelings today, but the sight of you drove all propriety to the winds. Believe me, I have no desire to thrust myself or my love on you. I know you belong to another. When I heard how sick Uncle Nat was, I could not resist the temptation to use that for an excuse to see you. God! How I have longed for this hour."

"Philip, how strange you talk. Isn't old Lebanon your home as of old? You know you are always welcome. Grandpa is sorry, I know, for the little tilt between you, and please do not refer to it. Dear Grandpa, I am so worried about him, and I am sure he will be delighted to see you."

"Well, Lydia, I am here, and we will allow no unpleasant thought of the past to mar our visit, for tomorrow I return to Bolton."

"Why so soon?"

"Well, there are several reasons. One of them is,

if I had been needed or you particularly wanted me, you would have sent for me."

"O, Philip! Had I gone according to the dictates of my heart, I surely would have sent for you. Grandma and I have talked over the situation several times and she suggested we send for you, and Grandpa once wondered where you were. He told us before he was taken ill that he heard in Bolton you had gone away for a long, indefinite stay. That didn't look as though you cared to keep in touch with Lebanon. When you ignored us for months, with never a line to tell us where or how you were, the months were long and weary, and I longed to hear from you or see you. Surely, Miss Montgomery would not begrudge a few crumbs of affection to the far-off mountain folk." Lydia's hand trembled as she ruthlessly stripped the fronds from a fern that grew near her, and her face was ashen gray.

"You talk in riddles, Lydia. You and Aunt Rhue well know the distance could never be too great nor the night too dark to hinder my coming to your call, and why mention Miss Montgomery? She is nothing to me; never has been; never will be."

Lydia's face blushed crimson. "Oh, Philip, don't, I beg you. Don't make me wish you had not come."

"My God, Lydia, what do you mean! Again, I repeat, Miss Montgomery is nothing to me. In mercy, explain, and above all tell me you are free and that all this gossip about you and Connolly is untrue. Aunt Nabbie Phillips told me to-day there was no truth in it."

"Philip, you must know there is nothing but

friendship between Roger Connolly and me. He has been kind and thoughtful while you have been absent, that is all."

Lydia, this is too good to be true." But Philip's countenance was sad with the sadness of one who was facing a great problem and his voice trembled as he proceeded. "If you are in earnest, Lydia, and I know you are, I have been the biggest block-head that ever lived, and, now, can you ever forgive my seeming neglect and forgetfulness of you? It completely unnerves me as I think of the long months wasted in trying to forget you, when my chances were fairly good to win the rarest treasure on earth to me. But everything looked against me. Bolton newspapers seemed to take delight in tantalizing me with every bit of gossip concerning you. I surely felt hurt when I read that you and Connolly drove to Bolton and spent the day and never a hint you were coming nor took a few minutes' time to hunt me up."

Lydia sat with hands folded across her knee and looked away over Baldy way, and, without looking at Philip, said: "Have you finished?"

"No, dear, I may as well make a clean breast of it. I can see now where I have been a coward, but the thing that sent me off and kept me away so long was this." He drew from his pocket a small book and from between its leaves drew forth a clipping and handed it to Lydia. It read:

"Rumor has it that Miss Lydia Wilbur, of Mt. Lebanon, the accomplished granddaughter of Mrs. Margaret Filmore, of Philadelphia, is engaged to Roger Connolly, Jr., of Philadelphia, son of Hon. Roger Connolly, the financier and railroad mag-

nate, and that the wedding will take place this fall, and that Mr. Connolly and bride will spend the winter in Europe."

Lydia silently folded the paper and handed it to Philip; then, looking at him with tears in her eyes, she opened the book in her lap and placed a scrap of paper in his hand. This clipping contained the announcement of Philip's engagement.

She said: "Philip, believe me, I never went to Bolton with Roger Connolly, neither has there ever been the least hint of engagement between us. This is news to me."

"My God, Lydia! Who do you suppose has done this dastardly thing. One word of love never passed my lips to Miss Montgomery. I scarcely know the young woman. She is a fine character and a young woman of sterling qualities, but there has never been but one woman for me. Lydia, how could any one be so cruel as to try to blight our lives! That this explanation could have come before! But, thank God, better late than never. It matters but little now what we are thought to be, for God knows what we really are. Cheer up, sweetheart, all things have become as new. You are my peerless love, the love of my boyhood, my manhood, my life. Let us try to forget the past and cease to search for the cowardly perpetrator who so nearly wrecked our lives. Let us rather be grateful that the victory is ours and that, in seeking for revenge, we are but even with the perpetrator. But by passing over and completely ignoring it, we can not help but be superior."

"Philip, whoever did this, simply ignored my dear Lebanon grandparents. They thought it

sounded more imposing to mention Grandmother Filmore and sting us a little deeper."

"I am exceedingly sorry that Uncle Nat is sick, but it has been the means of revealing this dastardly plot and wiping out with one master stroke the bitter enmity that was fast closing in on and rapidly separating us forever. When Uncle Si Newman dropped into my office yesterday and told me of Uncle Nat's illness, I had a struggle with self, whether I should come or not. You see, Uncle Nat and I had a squabble about the ledge-lot, and then, too, it didn't seem possible I could ever see you so taken up with another; but I feel like singing the doxology now.

"Now, about the ledge-lot. If Uncle Nat was able, he could close a deal with the P. & O. any time for fifty thousand dollars; but Lydia, he will never be able. Uncle Nat is a very sick man. Now, my precious one, can you, knowing all, pardon and forgive me. I know I have innocently caused you untold suffering and I should have been brave enough to come to you and given you a chance to explain."

"Hush, Philip! We have both suffered, but we can afford to forgive."

Philip said nothing, but sat still as though fighting for self-control. Looking at Lydia, he said: "Yes, the victor should always be magnanimous. And, now, Lydia, come to me, my old-time sweetheart, my love, my bride to be."

Lydia raised her eyes softened by the moisture of tears. "Dear old Philip, you have suffered too, and I fully understand now as never before. But, Philip, how should I know? You never told me that you cared for me more than for other girls. You never

cautioned me of the men of the world. No, your nature was far too generous for that, too noble to warn, but, Philip, you made a mistake. Perhaps you thought it better to let the little moth sing its wings a trifle in the glaring flame of others' attention that it might feel the burning sting of insincerity."

"No, dear, I felt that deep down in your heart the chalice of love was waiting, only waiting to be stirred, to be touched by the right love, and it must not be disturbed by me. You must have every opportunity to define it when the time came. God, how I fought for supremacy over jealousy as no man ever fought before! But I wanted you to be happy regardless of all else; you, the one I had adored ever since I used to tuck you in the old pung those cold, wintry mornings on Lebanon, when it was so cold the frosted breath would hang from old Bess's nostrils like strings of tiny pearls. Yes, it was you who must be happy. No one but God knew what I suffered when you went to Philadelphia, and the night you were graduated, my whole being was filled with pride and admiration and love for you. I was there because you were my idol, not because I felt worthy. I had made up my mind ——"

"Please don't, Philip!"

"Yes, I must go on. I had made up my mind that Aunt Rhue's flowers should seal my fate. If you ignored dear old Lebanon's floral offering, I would steal out into the darkness and speed away home. I was determined that you, my little Lebanon sweetheart, should have no interruptions in the school of love. If you had found some one you

cared for among your new associates, you should have time to thoroughly analyze your heart. Only God knows how my heart swelled with love and joy when I saw the wreath of simple wild flowers on your head and saw you bury your face in the fragrant white bloom of Aunt Rhue's lilacs. That told the story, dear, and a great wave of happiness passed over me as I gazed on you, my queen of Lebanon."

As they rose from the seat on the rock, Lydia laid her hands on Philip's shoulder and, looking him shyly in the eyes, said: "I have ever loved you, Philip, only you, and if I have learned a bit of the world, it has only helped me to be broader of understanding and more charitable and liberal in forgiveness. But, Philip, you have ever been my rock, my beacon light. When I was surrounded with people of wealth, education, talent, and those who boasted of birth and breeding, of travel, of luxury, my heart would sicken and I would long for Philip and Lebanon."

A deep flush crept over Philip's face as he drew her hand within his arm and whispered: "God bless you, my darling, my precious wife to be."

Lydia smiled and said: "Oh, Philip, you are as deep in love as you are in wisdom."

Through the falling twilight, they left the hollow and entered the homeward path, with the low, sweet twittering of birds settling in their nests, the sounds of woods-life drifting to rest, and the sacred silence of love and happiness surrounding them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Near the close of a beautiful afternoon, one of the dreamy afternoons that come late in autumn, when the slanting rays of sun drove shadows of its brightness through every crack and crevice, Lydia had just returned from Alden Center where she had been on an errand for Aunt Rhue. Philip was expected that evening by way of the Overland, for Uncle Nat had been failing rapidly lately and had come to realize fully the seriousness of his illness and seemed to want Philip near. The minister had been there that day, not the dear old family pastor, but a stranger who was supplying his place for a couple of weeks.

Aunt Rhue, foreseeing the approaching dark shadow, had felt in her Puritanic mind that something must be done to help Uncle Nat on his last journey. Not that she thought it would do him any special good, for she well knew what a staunch lover of piety and Godliness, tempered with justice and good will toward his fellow man, Uncle Nat had always been. Still she felt that it was her duty, but was sorely disappointed when a stranger came, for the pompous air of the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, with disarranged wig and stiff-starched shirt front, did not suggest the peace and comfort she had expected from Pastor Peabody. Uncle Nat was not spiritually benefited by the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's prayer as he knelt by his bed, for, with the quickening of spiritual instincts in the dying, Uncle Nat could see that there was nothing in that empty prayer for him, for the gold-headed cane that the Rev. Mr. Fletcher worshipped was no rod or staff to help him through the dark valley.

The tranquil, set phrases of his cold, unsympathetic nature made him peculiarly unfitted to be the confessor of either the sick or the dying. He did his best to sooth "these poor worms of the dust," as he called the family. He asked the Divine Majesty so far away to realize their necessity and come nearer, and to bless suitably the dying man. On leaving, he expressed the hope that Uncle Nat might be resigned to his lot, and, with great dignity, he took his hand and told him to be of good cheer, for he was in the hands of a merciful God.

Uncle Nat, the gentle, tender, sympathetic nature that saw divine presence in everything, that had worshipped and reveled in this beauty and holiness every day of his life; he that had soothed and assisted the weak and helpless, that had rigidly lived as far as possible the creed of the commandments — this man about to enter the great mysterious unknown was far from being benefited by the minister's visit.

But one thing had been gained. There would be a new topic for the afternoon tea-drinkings at Alden Center. Aunt Rhue had had the minister; for this little village ever kept up a lively interest concerning its neighbors.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Uncle Nat Wilbur was a fine-looking man and, on this particular evening, his eyes gleamed with unusual brightness, with that look of untold suf-

ering often seen in the eyes of wounded animals—too deep for expression, even a moan.

His course in life had been a quiet, unostentatious one; his evenly balanced brain had often acquired for him the name of judge among his neighbors, and he was loved and respected by every one of them.

Lydia, with her grandmother's help had just changed his position and smoothed his pillow, when Philip entered the room. A smile hovered around Uncle Nat's lips as he held out his hand and whispered:

"Philip, my boy, I'm glad you've come. Lyddy has told me."

Philip's voice trembled with emotion as he answered cheerily: "Thank you, Uncle Nat; I am glad to be here."

"Philip, I put Lyddy an' her grandmother in yer hands."

"I accept them willingly," Philip assured him.

Uncle Nat smiled. "Thank God for that. I leave all of ye in His hands. He doeth all things well." Then he motioned them to kneel, Lydia and Philip on one side and the loved and faithful gray-haired life-companion on the other. Laying his hand lovingly on her head, and the other on Lydia's and Philip's hands, he raised his eyes, smiled and said: "Father, I thank Thee."

As they arose from the bedside, they stood for a moment looking at Uncle Nat, a smile of heavenly radiance illumining his face. Then a faint whisper came: "Thy will be done," and the gentle spirit of the noble man had met his heavenly pilot face to face.

A suppressed sob from Lydia, as she slipped again to the floor, aroused Philip and Aunt Rhue. Aunt Rhue laid her hands on Lydia's bowed head and smoothed her hair as of old; then, motioning to Philip, she left the room. Philip knelt by Lydia's side and said:

"Uncle Nat is sleeping, Lydia. Won't you come with me to Aunt Rhue. She needs us."

Silently, they arose and left the room.

As Si Newman walked through the door of Dave Mile's grocery the evening before Uncle Nat's funeral, he was greeted on all sides with a hearty welcome, for Si was ever a welcome visitor.

"Wall, Si, what's ther latest?" asked old Abe Barum. "I'm glad yer dropped in before I left. Now, fer goodness sake, do tell us all erbout Nat Wilbur's funeral an' buryin' termorrer, fer I s'pect ye know all erbout it."

"Wall, I guess ye hev struck ther right man, Uncle Abe, fer I'm ther chap ez kin tell ye." Pushing his hat well back, Si resumed: "What do ye want ter know fust? But I s'pose there'll be plenty uv questions ter answer all erlong ther line by ther looks uv yer eager faces. It's er 'mazin' pity yer hev sich 'quisitive opinions fer yer dead neighbor, but sail in."

"Wall, Si, things air so unusual on Leb'non, it makes er feller want ter know ther truth uv it," said Abe Barnum, spokesman for the crowd. "They tell me thet Uncle Nat's will hain't goin' ter be read, nor is his corpse ter be exposed at ther funeral, an' thet they're not even ergoin' ter take him ter ther church. Hain't thet ernough ter stir up ther com-

munity and make folks ask questions? I tel ye, it'll be disapinting, Si, disapinting. Ye know it's been er long time since we've hed er funeral thet ermounts ter anything, an' ev'rybody wuz expectin' ter go to his'n, an' I tell ye it'll be disapinting. Why, ev'rybody's talkin', Si. Cain't yer do some-thin' ter change ther plans?"

"Wall, I'll be goldarned, ef I wuzn't expectin' somethin' uv this kind. It's highty tighty when yer born, highty tighty when yer married, an' highty tighty when yer die. Good Lord o' massey, Abe, folks hain't no right ter feel bad erbout other folks' idees erbout funerals. This 'ere's a free country, boys, er free country since 1776, an' I guess Uncle Nat's folks hez er right ter ther own way erbout his funeral. But I want ter tell yer right 'ere thet Uncle Nat looks jest beautiful. Yes, siree, a better-lookin' corpse I never see, so I'll jest set yer minds ter rest on thet subject — thar's nothin' ther matter with Uncle Nat thet's keepin' 'em frum exposin' him funeral day.

"Ef ye want ter see Uncle Nat, jest go up ter-morrer mornin' an' I'll be on hand ter gratify yer curiosity. I happen ter know how ye got yer gossipy news. 'Twas because Betsy Ross an' Aunt Patty Baker didn't git ter see Uncle Nat at eight er'clock in ther mornin'. They wan't ready fer strangers ter view him till they'd got er little used ter ther sorrow uv partin' from him themselves; so they refused. I heard they wuz so mad they jawed all ther way back ter Alden.

"'Nother thing: when they wuz told, arter much quizzin' thet thar wuz to be no shroud, they held up ther hands in horror an' ther tongues wagged

harder'n ever. 'Twas a pity, they said, thet er man like Uncle Nat hed ter be laid out in his own clo's, when his folks hed plenty uv money ter buy er handsome shroud. I jest happen ter know all erbout it, fer I wuz ther identical chap they interviewed on thet occasion."

"But, Si ——" began Uncle Abe.

"Ye jest shet up, Abe Barnum, till I git through. Then ye kin wag yer tongue till termorrer's milkin' time. Ye asked me ther questions an' yer goin' ter git ther answers with intrust. Ef ye want ter know anything erbout true sorrer an' death on Lebanon I kin tell yer they're sad, boys, sad. Thar's one thing sartin, they're followin' Uncle Nat's directions ter ther letter; so don't blame 'um. Ye all know Nat Wilbur allus did his duty by ev'ry durn thing he come in contact with, let it be er human bein' er animal, bird uv ther air, er even an insect. I know yer cur'us, boys, but ye jest better let Uncle Nat's mem'ry alone. Don't mar it by any onpleasant remarks. Ef ye want ter see him once more, don't wait fer ther funeral. Did any one of ye, er any one ye know uv, ever go to Nat Wilbur fer er favor er advice an' come erway without it? Jest speak up."

"No, Si, no," came from every mouth.

"Then shet up."

"Yes, Si, but ye hev ther inside track. Ye know ev'rything. Why, ye even hed ther privilege uv settin' up with him an' seein', an' hearin' ev'rything goin' on."

"Wall, boys, ye needn't envy me thet, fer it wuz tough ernough, but I hope I'm er better man inside fer it, an' I want ter tell yer one thing, ef ye'd git

eround er leetle more an' be er leetle more neighbor-like, ye wouldn't pick so many flaws in 'em when they come ter die. I reckon we'd all act an' talk er leetle diffrent ef we cud jest see ourselves ez others see us. We wouldn't draw so many durn critical conclusions erbout our neighbors. Now, erbout Uncle Nat's bein' laid out an' buried in his own clo's, thet's nothin'. Wuzn't Abraham Lincoln buried in his clo's — one uv ther best men God ever let live! Better go up termorrer 'fore ther funeral, boys; Uncle Nat looks ez natural ez if he wuz ersleep."

"Si, ye fergot ter tell us erbout ther will. Do ye know anything erbout it?"

"Wall, ef I do, I didn't git it by hangin' eround ther grocery an' post-office an' tavern. See here, boys, le's drop this, but thar's one thing sure: we cain't run Uncle Nat's funeral nor ther hull universe ter suit ourselves, fer ther Lord A'mighty an' Aunt Rhue hez er hand in thet, an', furthermore, ye don't need ter swap this gossip, nor nod yer heads nor wag yer Baptist nor Methody tongues, fer Uncle Nat's safe," and Si shifted his quid, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and left the store.

But his homely expressions of sympathy and loyalty to his dead friend had subdued their ardor for news, and, after making arrangements for a visit in a body to Lebanon the following morning, they departed for their homes, one by one.

As Si wended his way back to Lebanon, he said to himself: "Gosh all fish-hooks, I cud hev thrashed ther hull gossipy crowd. Why, ther hain't er womankind, widow er old maid in ther hull uv Alden Center thet kin hold er candle ter ther gossip

uv men. They didn't know all I overhead 'fore I stepped in."

No person rendered more loving service on Lebanon than did Si Newman. He watched and worried and would even have scolded if it had been necessary to relieve Lydia and her grandmother of every care.

Across the sun-kissed, withered grass, in the old South Church graveyard, they carried the precious burden of all that was left of Uncle Nat. The deep tolling of the bell had brought together the villagers who were not able to climb the hill to Lebanon, and now they tenderly laid to rest, beside the myrtle clad graves of those he loved so well, Uncle Nat. Aunt Rhue's face quivered as she listened to the last service; but the loving arms about her, both of Lydia and Philip, reassured her that she was not alone. As they tenderly led her away, she turned her head and looked back for a last pitiful good-by and whispered: "Thy will be done," but the way was not easy. Lydia kissed the wrinkled brow and Philip drew her tenderly to him. This simple act of humanity soothed the burdened soul of Aunt Rhue.

The late afternoon sun lay in patches across the graves and a gentle breeze stirred the branches of the trees, making soft light and shadows across their path as they began their homeward journey.

If they had chanced to look into Aunt Rhue's face, they would have seen her noble self-control, stirred by deep emotion, for had she not come home for the first time in many years, alone?

As they ascended the broad piazza-step, she

turned and looked far across the meadows toward old Baldy where the sun was lying warm and bright on its farthest peak. Then, a look of peace settled on her face as she turned and entered the house. Lydia helped remove her wraps; then went on through the house and out the kitchen-door. Then on down the path to the grape-arbor that Uncle Nat loved so well, and, dropping down on the bench, buried her face in her folded arms. Later, she was aroused by a firm step and Philip gently touched her brow with his lips.

"Supper is waiting, dear. Will you come in?"

That evening, in the soft glow of an autumn moon near its full, Philip, sitting near Aunt Rhue, laid his hand on hers, and, with Lydia hovering over, told her of his love for Lydia and how he wanted to make her his wife.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

There are people, when aroused to the fact that they have committed a crime or wrong, who are willing to acknowledge it. Hence, the afternoon following Uncle Nat's funeral, a boy rode up to the Wilbur home and handed a letter to Lydia, who was sitting on the doorstep. "No answer," the boy said, and immediately rode away. Lydia turned the envelope over and examined the seal. The writing looked familiar, but she could not remember the writer. Mechanically, she opened it and drew

forth the letter, still puzzled. After glancing at the signature, she read:

"Dear Miss Wilbur:

"Here I am, all done up in bandages and splints, the result of a nasty fall from a ledge of rock. I have just been reading *The Alderson News* and learned of the death of your grandfather. I will waste no words, but can truly say I am sorry, sorry for you in your grief, but far more sorry and deeply humiliated for my own cowardly self, and I am wondering now if you and Philip Strong can ever pardon and forgive me.

"I loved you, I thought, as truly and honestly as was possible, and in this state, I felt that love like mine must be rewarded in time. I tried, as you know, every honorable way to win you; but, when that failed, I resorted to a hideous, wicked way of separating you from what I could easily see was your loyalty to Philip Strong. My face burns as I try, with pen and ink, to right the great wrong I did to both you and Strong. I had inserted in the Bolton papers that you and I spent the day there together. It was I, when I knew that Strong was far away, that sent the lie to the same paper that you and I were engaged. It was I that sent to the Springfield paper the announcement of Philip Strong's engagement to Miss Montgomery, which I showed you, but I did not show you where she denied it in the next issue.

"I have made a clean acknowledgment. Do with me as you think best. Do not spare me, but forgive me for intruding on the sacredness of your sorrow. I could not rest until I had let you know the enormity of my crime, and thus try to make amends

and heal the breach in your friendship for Strong. One word of forgiveness will ease the troubled conscience of

“Roger Connolly.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was ten days after the funeral. Everything had settled back into its old quiet way. Philip had gone to Bolton on business for Aunt Rhue and also to adjust his own, and to make plans for several weeks' absence.

The day was a most perfect one. The frost, the night before, had freshened the air and added to the beauty of tree and shrub. After dinner, Lydia threw a light shawl about her and, telling her grandmother she was going for a walk, left the house and followed the path to Crystal Spring. Here, she paused long enough to drink from the home-made cocoanut-dipper that hung by a string to a beech sapling.

She passed Silver Beech Hollow and kept on and on back into the deep, cool shade of the forest; back where the shadows lie silent; back where all voice of humankind was left far behind, where no sound save the crackle of the twig or dead falling leaf, or the note of some bird late in leaving for the sunny southland, could be heard.

Lydia seated herself on a fallen tree and gazed around her. The dear old woods, every tree was familiar. They seemed like old friends welcoming

her home. She laid her wrap on a limb and rested her tired head. Her eyes burned with the heat of unshed tears, but the dull look was gone. This was to be Lydia's last trip to the deep woods that year, and a yearning longing had been in her heart all day to come.

Here, she could think undisturbed, and there was so much to think of. Her plans were so unsettled. There has been such a change in the last few weeks. She seemed to find no solution suitable to the many problems that came rushing to her tired brain. First, her Grandmother Wilbur must not be left alone in her sorrow and loneliness. Her Grandmother Filmore's insistent letters from abroad that she join her at once in Naples and spend the winter there, annoyed her. The great, tender thoughtful love of Philip was to be considered. There was the trip far beyond Alden to see Roger Connolly and assure him of forgiveness, for it seemed better to go direct to the root of the matter, than to send a letter. Perhaps, Philip would go with her on his return, after she had made known her wishes and the reason. She was ready to forgive, since she was sure of this great love, the love of Philip who would henceforth shield and protect her.

She raised her eyes and said: "O, Father, keep me. You are so necessary to my happiness. Help me to be a comfort to dear Grandma and Philip. Forgive me for my blindness in trying to plan my own life instead of just leaving it in Thy dear hands. Just guide me and help me to lay aside all my ambitions for the future. Help me to be a comfort. Bless Grandma and help me to help fill Grandpa's place. It is hard, but again I beg Thee to blot out

all the ambition and desire to answer the calls from the great outer world."

She raised her head and saw not far away, like a bit of fallen sky, tilting back and forth on a slender limb, a blue bird. All the loneliness fled from her heart and she burst into tears, the floodgates of relief, the first she had been able to shed.

"You dear little sunshine, why are you so late in leaving for your loved Southland? I know you just stayed to bring this message of relief to my burdened heart."

The tiny bird tilted its head first to one side and then to the other, as if it really understood, and, giving a chirp of farewell, winged out of sight.

Lydia had not confided to Philip the letter she had received from Roger Connolly. It had been laid aside and practically forgotten during the last few days. As Lydia recalled the events of the last week, the receipt of Connolly's letter came vividly before her and the thought of what she should do. She realized fully how nearly it had cost her both Philip and his love, that love so lasting, so true. Then came the thought: How would Philip take it, if she told him all? Philip, with his high ideals of manhood and honor, would he, like she, in the fullness of restored confidence and love, be willing to overlook and forgive? She would take the chances and, on Philip's return, would show him the letter. It was no time to conceal anything. Too much had already been lost. Here was an opportunity not to be neglected. She would live up to the high ideal she had ever fostered. She would raise still higher her standard of integrity and honor.

It would be a good lesson to Connolly. She would

teach him there was something more than flattery necessary to satisfy the heart, something that could turn jealousies into balm for wounded pride. She would teach him that a country-bred girl could be magnanimous. But it must be done in a quiet, dignified way that would corroborate the life she had lived when with him.

Yes, on Philip's return, she would place in his hand the confession and tell him her plan. If he approved it, they would go together and prove to Connolly he was forgiven. Suppose Philip did not approve of her plan — what would she do? She would go alone, if need be, or, better still, take trusty Jake Danvers with her.

The blessed quiet of the deep woods had helped her solve her problem. She arose from her seat and glanced around. Her stay had been long and unnoticed. The shadows had deepened. She drew her shawl about her and quickly departed.

The short October day was drawing to a close. Too late to read or sew, too early for a light, Lydia pushed aside her sewing-basket and crossed to the window and looked out. The large beech and maple trees lashed their branches from the fury of the winds singing through them. A few feathery snowflakes came floating lazily down, dancing hither and thither. The fire crackled in the big open fireplace as the wind whistled down the chimney-tunnel.

The distant toot of Si Newman's horn warned Lydia there was a message for some one at the house. Hastily throwing a warm wrap around her, she hurried toward the door. On opening it, she ran full tilt into Philip.

"Philip Strong, where did you come from? Uncle Si tooted his horn a moment ago, and I was just going to see what it meant."

"Well, dear, it simply meant nothing this time. I coaxed Uncle Si to wait until I had about reached the house before he gave his warning. At this moment, Aunt Rhue entered the living-room.

"Fer land's sake, Philip, whar did yer come frum; but ye air welcome at any rate, fer it's been lonesome on Leb'non without ye."

"Thank you, Aunt Rhue. I am glad to be missed, but come to the fire and see Lydia's gift, as well as yours."

He took from his pocket a tiny box and drew forth a circle of gold, set with one large clear lustrous pearl, which he slipped on Lydia's finger. Then, he put into Aunt Rhue's hand a small box, saying: "No one is to see this until you have seen it first. Please do not open it here."

Aunt Rhue, standing in the glow of the ruddy blaze, placed her hands, one in each of theirs, and said: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

In the privacy of her own room, Aunt Rhue opened the little box and there, smiling up at her, was the portrait of Uncle Nat.

As Lydia and Phillip drew near the engineer's camp, they quietly slipped from their horses. Philip tethered them to a couple of saplings, and they advanced and inquired of a man who was cleaning potatoes for supper, where they could find Roger Connolly.

The man looked up from his work and said: "An' be jabbers, if yez folly yer nose, you'll find the young

spalpeen round the other side ov the cabin ferninst a couple of threes."

As they turned the corner, according to directions, they came upon a cot beneath the trees, on which Roger Connolly was lying with closed eyes. The snapping of dead branches aroused him, and, on opening his eyes, he saw his visitors. He was shocked at the sight of them advancing with outstretched hands.

His eyes glistened as he exclaimed: "Hello, Gad, but this is splendid of you both," and he took their hands and bade them welcome.

"Miss Wilbur, you're a regular trump, and as for Strong, I can't begin to thank him. I want to assure you I am not worthy such magnanimous treatment."

Philip said a few polite words in reply and they immediately turned the conversation to his accident and the extension of the P. & O. Railroad. After visiting a while, Connolly called to the cook to bring some refreshments. After partaking, and shaking Connolly heartily by the hand, the guests departed, happy in living the Golden Rule.

After they were gone, Connolly covered his face with his hands and said to himself: "By gad, that was a whopping big thing for them to do. I don't believe I ever could have done it. My, oh, me, but Lydia Wilbur shows her old Puritan blood all right, and Strong is not far behind; but she was superb in her quiet, gentle way. Why, I never loved her half so much as I do this very moment, but I must cut it out. Strong is the man for her. No one can deny their love for each other, and no one but themselves will ever have any conception of what it cost

them to do this thing for me. Why, it makes me feel like a baby. It has actually taken every bit of strength out of me. It was a great thing for her to do. God bless her!"

After leaving Connolly, the subject was never mentioned, and Lydia went home with a happy heart.

It was late in the spring. Before an open fireplace, with its crackling, ruddy blaze, Lydia was sitting in her little rocker, her book lying in her lap. Her hand was raised to ward off the light from the fire's blaze.

Philip had drawn his chair near her and was looking dreamily into the fire. The rain and sleet dashed against the windows and there was a roar in the chimney that told of the terrific wind raging without. The firelight was so bright that the candles had not been lighted.

They both sat quiet, each wrapped in thought so deep as to be seemingly oblivious, one of the other. At last, Philip laid his hand lovingly and reverently on Lydia's and said:

"How long, Lydia, must I wait to claim my bride? Can't you decide to-night? You know I have been patient, dear. The winter is nearly over."

"Philip, please do not ask it of me at present. You know I have planned for years to teach, and, regardless of Grandmother Filmore's forbidding it, and of your dear love, I feel I must fulfil my ambition. No, no, Philip please do not try to dissuade me. I will briefly give my reason. First of all, you well know I can not leave Grandmother for a long time, and, second, it would be unjust, all wrong, to tie you up to Lebanon after all the hard work and saving and planning you have done and the

sacrifice you have made. It would not be right, dear. You are in line for a splendid, successful career. Just think of the advantages you have with Judge Palmer. No, Philip, do not tempt me. Then, there is the opportunity for me to take charge of the French and Latin classes in the Seminary, at Alderson, and the music lessons I could give."

"Yes, Lydia, all you say may be true; but in the meantime, what is to become of Aunt Rhue and me? No, dear, marry me, and I will give up all and settle here on Lebanon, or take you and Aunt Rhue to Bolton, just as you please."

"Please, Philip, do not try to misunderstand me. We ought to be able to give up each other with a willing spirit for a year or two. You know we are young, and we will allow only the purest and sweetest harmony to exist between us. A living love in anticipation, dear, ought to be unspeakably preferable to a dull gray existence of regret. Ours shall be a pure love, beautiful and expressive. You do not know what you have always been to me, Philip; your tender watch-care has been a benediction so pure, so simple, so unaffected. For this precious love, dear, the flowers seem sweeter, the dewdrop clearer, the sun brighter. I feel it, in fact, in everything. At times, when I am alone, it seems like a soft tinted veil enveloping me, a veil drawn from the holiest of holies, and exposing to view its inner shrine, so bright and pure.

"The time will soon pass. Human cares will seem less arduous and the commonest duties will cease to be irksome. We shall both be so busy that time will fly, and then we shall be satisfied. We will try to be real burden-bearers through Him who ever

strengthens. The call is so loud, and the need is so great, for just such personalities as yours. Don't worry about Grandma. I shall see to it that she is well cared for. Aunt Mollie Devers will come and live here, and Josey's willing hands will do the work and watch over them. I shall not be far away. Fifteen miles is a short distance and Uncle Si will tell me of Lebanon every other day, and twice a month I shall go to Bolton for my music and to see Philip Strong."

"O, Lydia, how can you put me off when we have both suffered so?"

"Never mind, Philip, we are only passing through the refining process. We are young, and, as I said before, the time will pass quickly. Listen, Philip, dear. You know our lives are what we make them. If we are willing to work and climb, we can write our names at almost any height we choose. Please do not ask me to be ambitionless and stay at the bottom when I have planned so for years. Have you ever noticed 'that the ones whose names live past the grave line are the ones who have worked'—have done something worth while? Some carve, some compose, some paint great and beautiful pictures, yes, wonderful pictures, and some write books, good books, with clean, wholesome morals, books that have influenced people, helped change their natures, have helped make them better for the reading.

"We must not be selfish. God has mapped out our lives along special lines, and we must not shirk. I have often felt so shut in, or rather so shut out from doing any good, but, after all, Lebanon is the dearest place in all the world to me. I know that

nature, with lavish hand, has granted me what a life beyond the hills could never satisfy. Then, there's my book, Philip, the little book I am writing. You did not know, dear, of this message I am hoping to give to the great, wide world beyond. I believe there are many who are hungry for even a pen-glimpse of our dear mountain life; so I have decided, during my vacation time, while you are out in the great, busy world carving for yourself a reputation, I will devote the time to giving a message to my sisters beyond the hills, sisters whose lives run in a sort of a groove. I had thought not to tell you at present, but it seems imperative that you know."

"Lydia," said Philip, his eyes shining, "this is worth while. Stick close to your idea of giving a glimpse of real life to the world beyond. Brush all obstacles away. You are right, dear. Send a message as you describe and show a clamoring people what you can do. Borrow no set phrases, be your own teacher, your own true self, write, in your own plain, simple way, of fields and woods, mountain and swamp, birds and bees, give sermons from stones and songs from running brooks.

"I thank God that your life beyond the mountains has not spoiled you, my Lebanon Queen, but rather taught you to winnow the wheat from the chaff. It has purified and refined, only as experience can, and has given to you a heart of gold, a soul unsullied and pure. In your literary work, give a message that will not only satisfy but teach. But again I say, come to me, my wife to be."

"For shame, Philip," laughed Lydia. "You tempt me. But no, no! Let me work out my own

problem. Only a year or two at the longest, only a short time, dear."

"Lydia, you do not know what you are doing. Some day, the wall of your wild ambition will fall, the gate to its citadel fly open. Then you will admit me, dear; then you will be mine."

He lifted her hands and clasped them in both his own. They trembled in the strong embrace. Her lips quivered; she closed her eyes, then, as lightly as the fall of a rose petal, Philip's lips touched her forehead, and he released her hands. She did not hear him go, so reverently did he leave her presence.

"Oh, Philip! Always the same, always the same." Long, she sat, reasoning with her heart. At last, she clasped her hands, and, from her lips, came the words: "I thank Thee for Philip; I thank Thee for love; make me worthy of such sacrifice."

Now her hungry heart called forth every vestige of womanly pride lest her ambitious courage fail. The situation was of her own choosing and now, what if the result of her determinations should be undesirable? She resolved she would bear it alone and as best she could. "No, I will not allow such a thought even to cross the threshold of my heart."

She was proud and happy that Philip had yielded to her wishes, and it stimulated her ambition anew. O, how hard she would try to prove to his dear heart that she was right. She would prove to him that a life well spent was heroism. Again came the thought, how could she live without him. He had always been such a comfort and now she felt afraid he might undervalue her love for him after this decided declaration of her independence. But she,

too, had suffered. She had laid aside the crown of wifehood for the uncertain crown of laurel. But with this prayer of guidance, she was content:

“The Lord bless us and keep us;
The Lord make His face to shine upon us and be
gracious unto us;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon us and
give us peace.”

Some months ago, she would — before she had passed through the sacrificial fire — have taken her beloved and been satisfied. But not now. The deeper love had prevailed. The sacrifice had been made and she hoped Philip would succeed, would succeed to the extent that would eventually wipe out every vestige of objection her Grandmother Filmore had to their marriage. Her ambition for Philip exceeded that for herself and, if at times, it seared and pained her, she would murmur not. She would be brave, for Philip must have his chance in the world. She would fight on alone this fierce battle of withheld love, for by this time her heart had become a veritable battle-field. Yes, she would offer a gift of frankinsence on the altar of love and thereby blot out the bitter myrrh of regret. She felt happier to know that henceforth Philip's heart would beat in unison with hers and thus more than ever cement the bond of love between them. After she was ready for bed, she still thought on, threshing out problem after problem in regard to her future life.

The fire burned low, the clock tolled off the hour of midnight, yet Lydia sat on, a solitary witness to the lateness of the hour. She had entered her

Gethsemane. In her lap, lay the little worn Bible her Grandmother Wilbur had placed in her father's hands so many years ago. She turned it over and over, again fingering it with reverence becoming the solemnity of the occasion; then she raised it to her lips and kissed the crimson-stained leaves, now faded to a dull brown, and said: "Help me to be true and pure and good." She arose, strengthened in the beauty of renewed purpose. She would go forth with renewed determination.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

When Philip had been gone a day or two, Lydia confided her plans to her grandmother. After a few moments' silence, as though weighing a great and mighty subject, Aunt Rhue looked over her spectacles and replied:

"Lyddy, better think ther matter over careful-like 'fore ye decide. Don't break ther boy's heart. I'm erfraid yer don't know how much Philip loves yer. Once, I said ter him, long ago, in fact, it wuz ther year he graduated, sez I: 'Philip, ye air gettin' erlong amazin.' He smiled sadlike, an' said: 'Do ye think so, Aunt Rhue? Wall, it's all due ter Lyddy.' An' when ye wuz sick unto death almost, he jest dropped ev'rything, jest sacrificed his business an' shut up shop an' come here an' nussed ye like er baby.

"I dunno ez I know how ter make it plain ter ye, but he's jest devotion itself. He's no whirlwind

uv er lover like some, but it's thar. Now, see here, child, ye cain't fool yer old grandmother, an' what's more, yer ownheart is ez full uv it ezer eggisuv meat. I know, child, yer think yer doin' ther right thing by him, but it's all wrong, all wrong. Yer goin' ter hurt Philip's feelin's, too. Thar's ther boy almost ter ther top rung uv ther ladder uv success, an' he's arned it, too. Now, fer heaven's sake, don't yer cause him any more heartache an' sleepless nights. The boy hez suffered ernough. He's climbed from the very foot, remember, nothin' but er leetle orphan boy workin' fer his board, an' now arter all he's gone through, ye air goin' ter side-track an' watch him waitin' ter see which way ther balance will drop, whether it'll be ther love side er ther ambition side. Think it over well, child. Don't kill all his hopes an' ambitions with one stroke. Ye must think this over calmly 'fore ye act."

Lydia's voice trembled as she replied: "You are right, Grandma. Every word you say is true. Philip is noble and good and true, and I love him; but I will not alter my decision. Philip must have his opportunity unhampered by anything or anybody. He is young and ambitious and strong, with a cool, level brain, and he must and shall have every advantage due him. His business calls him far away from home. He must be free to go. He must see more of the world, of life, of other women. I shall be true to him, Grandma, but Philip must have his chance. Do not think this is easy for me. Far from it; but again I say, I will not stand in Philip's way."

Aunt Rhue had developed a remarkable degree of resignation in her bereavement and, if her voice

trembled and her eye grew moist sometimes, she smiled it all away.

She was heard to remark one day: "I tell ye life is too short ter go erbout with er pall uv sorrow draped over yer countenance. It's only castin' er gloom over ev'rybody. I say, smile an' ther world smiles with yer. Father didn't believe in it any more'n I do. He allus said he didn't believe in long-faced Christians, thet ther best Christian he ever knew was a whistlin', smilin' one, with er glad hand fer ev'ry occasion."

So she helped Lydia in every way possible, stifled every thought of separation and loneliness, and, when Lydia mentioned anything about being sorry to leave her, she would reply with a smile:

"Don't worry erbout me, Lyddy, child. When yer put yer hand ter ther plow, never look back. Jest keep an eye on ther furrer an' it's sure ter be straight. Too much worry an' lookin' back is like ter make er crooked row. Don't do it, child, don't do it. Ye know, Lyddy, by hist'ry et's creepin' on ter nigh three hundred years, wall, it's over two hundred an' fifty any way, since er handful uv men an' women left England for conscience sake, so ter speak, an' et wuz said uv them at thet time thet God sifted ther whole nation that He might send ther choicest grain inter ther wilderness. Wall, Lyddy, don't ever fergit thet ye're entitled ter thet 'ere sayin', fer yer got ther blood in yer. Yer great grandfather, on both sides, an' yer grandpas hed fightin' blood an' spilled it, too, fer ther cause uv liberty, ter say nothin' uv yer own pa an' grandpa. Jest keep yer heart an' soul allus primed ter do right, an' don't look back. Jest chirk up. Times

er passin'. Jest think uv ther pleasure we'll hev readin' yer letters an' watching fer yer ev'ry Saturday night, an', la, child, it's not fur. Why, ef I git ther least bit homesick ter see my sunshine, I'll jest run down ter Alderson with yer Uncle Si ter feast my eyes on yer. Then jest ter think uv our Lyddy er teachin' them air outlandish languages. No, siree; ye stick ter yer track an' keep lookin' erhead."

Lydia slipped an arm around her and kissed her wrinkled cheek: "Dearest of grandmothers, always so brave and true. You are right. I will try and plow a straight furrow and try not to look back. I feel ashamed and humiliated when I think of your noble and brave courage and, if I have any, I shall not give all the credit to my grandfathers. If I am not mistaken, there were some loyal women among that crowd that came into the wilderness."

Philip was saddened beyond words when he and Lydia had their last interview. He submitted reluctantly to her wishes, but he was determined to accept his fate and find in success a solace for the bitter disappointment.

The following morning found him on his way toward Bolton. He enjoyed the visit with Si Newman and many a bit of good homely advice did he receive from the old stage-driver. After reaching home and straightening out matters at the office, he remembered his promise to Lydia to write her Grandmother Filmore. It was no easy task to approach this woman by communication of pen. He was busy writing for a while and then he held up and read the following:

"Mrs. Elizabeth Filmore,
"Baden Baden, Germany.

"Dear Madam:

"This communication will announce my engagement to your granddaughter, Lydia Margaret Wilbur, with full consent of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Wilbur. I have loved her from childhood.

"Sincerely hoping this will meet with your approval, I am

"Respectfully yours,

"Philip Strong,

"Bolton, Vermont."

In looking over her mail, Mrs. Filmore failed to recognize Philip's writing, and laid the letter aside until she had read the rest. But when she had opened and read Philip's letter, her anger knew no bounds. She bade her companion leave her for a while, even sent her on some trivial errand, telling her to return in an hour. When she was alone she gave vent to her great displeasure.

"The ungrateful child," she fumed. "So this is why she refused to leave Lebanon. What shall I do? The very idea of her throwing herself away on that nameless country bumpkin, when she could have made a brilliant alliance with people of note. Lydia, thee shames me, even as thy mother did before thee. What can I do, with thousands of miles between us? But I must arouse and plan. Ah, I will plan for thy coming to me even here in far off Germany. A story that I am ill and need her will surely bring her at once. I am glad Lydia mentioned in her letter that there was to be a long

engagement. That will help me out. Once I get thee, Lydia, here in the old world with all its old and unique attractions, I am sure there will be no more of this country infatuation. Talk about love and childhood! pooh! Lydia should be wooed and won in the good old chivalrous way, and I will see to it that she is. 'Hope it meets with my approval.' Not at all, Philip Strong, do I approve of thy attachment to my grand-daughter. Thee must give her up. Oh, Lydia, why does thee tarry so long? But I will write thee a letter that will tumble this house of cards down and, as for Philip Strong, I will not notice nor acknowledge thy presuming letter. How dare thee write such a letter to me!"

The next mail carried a letter to Lydia.

"My dear Lydia:

"My only grandchild, here I am in far off Germany alone but for my faithful companion. I am ill and need thee. Prepare for a journey and come to me at once. I feel thy presence would cheer and comfort me. Enclosed, find draft to cover expenses. I shall count the days as long until I behold thy dear face. I am sure thy grandmother will be glad to have thee take the trip. Kind remembrances to all on Lebanon.

"Thy loving grandmother,

"Margaret Filmore."

After reading the letter, Lydia wearily raised her hand and brushed back her hair; then she entered the kitchen where her grandmother was. Listlessly seating herself, she unfolded and read the letter.

"Grandmother, what shall I do, for I simply can not and will not go so far away from you and

Philip, and, if I can read correctly between the lines, this is a mere ruse to get me away from Philip. She must have received Philip's letter telling her of our engagement and this is the result. What shall I do?"

"Wall, Lyddy, don't make up yer mind in sech a hurry; it's er woman's privilege ter change her mind ef she sees fit, so there's no harm done. Why, child, ye do jest ez ye think best. Of course, it would be a delightful trip an' er great opportunity ter travel an' see another world, an', child, ye might never hev sech a chance erg'in. An', if yer heart inclines in thet direction ther least bit, ye had better grasp this opportunity fer, ez I say, it might never knock at yer door erg'in. Ez fer me, I'm all right. Aunt Molly would stay with me an' we could hear often frum ye. An' then er summer erbroad would be er wonderful eddication, dear, an' might be er great advantage ter ye in yer teachin' this fall. I wouldn't decide too quick. I think er change would do ye er world uv good an' fer pity's sake, don't let me stand in yer way fer a minnit."

"Oh, you dear, self-sacrificing grandmother, always the same," cried Lydia, as she left the room.

Aunt Rhue crossed the room and looked out the window through misty eyes. "Wall, self-sacrificin'! How them air words did cut an' what er ol' hypocrite I am. Ef thet child only knowed how it tugged my ol' heart-strings ter say it, she would never erg'in call me self-sacrificin'. Ez fer her Grandmother Filmore, wall, ef she thinks fer er minnit thet I'd stand in ther way uv thet child's pleasure, she is grandly mistaken. No, siree, Lyddy shall go an' there'll be no whinin' over it, nuther. Ez fer

ez I'm concerned, I think there's nothin' more pitiful than er life spent in thinkin' uv nothin' but one's self."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Mt. Lebanon, Green Mountains, Vt.

"Dear Grandmother:

"I am very sorry to learn you are not well and truly hope, before this reaches you, that you will have entirely recovered from the illness which prompted the letter written me. I thank you more than I can express for the draft to cover expenses to go to you in Germany, but, as I can not go, I am returning it. I can not think of leaving Lebanon at present. Since Grandpa left us, it's so lonely and Grandmother is not well, and there is much business to attend to.

"I have accepted a position in the Young Ladies' Seminary, at Alderson, as instructress in Latin, German, and French; will also give lessons in harp-music. I do not do this from necessity, because Grandpa provided most bountifully for me. I am taking up this work because I love it. Grandmother Wilbur has cared for me for many years, and needs me now as never before. I can not leave her.

"With best wishes for a speedy recovery and much appreciation and love, I am,

"Your granddaughter,

"Lydia Wilbur."

After every one had retired, Aunt Rhue sat down to the old secretary and proceeded to arrange for her writing. Drawing the ink-horn to her, she deliberately dipped her quill and laboriously penned the following:

“Mrs. Filmore:

“There’s no one but God and myself knows anything about this here letter-writing. But I jest wanted to clear my skirts about our Lyddy’s not crossing the ocean, for she’s determined not to go. I’m sorry you’re sick, but don’t blame me for Lyddy’s not going. It was kind of you to send a draft, but please remember in future to omit it for it’s unnecessary. We are abundantly able to defray expenses anywhere we might choose to go. Philip Strong, that’s Lyddy’s intended, has just closed a deal with the P. & O. R.R. for the north pasture ledge for forty thousand dollars and that’s not all.

“Yours for health,

“Rhue Wilbur.”

Aunt Rhue folded and placed the letter in its envelope, sealed it with Uncle Nat’s old seal, addressed it, and said: “Thar, thet job’s done, an’ er hard one it wuz, too. I’ll have Jake pass this ter Si Newman down ther road er piece termorrer mornin’. No use ter disturb Lyddy erbout it when it’s only an ol’ woman’s whim; but I don’t want Mrs. Filmore ter think Lyddy’s stayin’ ter home ter keep us frum ther pore house. No, no!”

In due time, both letters reached Mrs. Filmore. If she was displeased, she never showed it; but she was seriously alarmed about and strenuously op-

posed to Lydia's engagement; but, being prone to sidetrack anything that disturbed her, she put it from her mind as something that could wait. She was delighted it was to be a long engagement, and she would reach home long before its termination. That Lydia was free, with her own choice, was a great conciliation to her.

The next day, Lydia and her grandmother drove down Alden way to do a little shopping. On the way home, as Lydia stopped Bess to rest, her grandmother said:

"Lyddy, hev ye writ ter yer grandmother?"

"Yes," replied Lydia, "I gave the letter to Uncle Si this morning."

"When air ye goin' ter start?"

"What do you mean, Grandmother?"

"Wall, I jest thought perhaps ye wuz goin' ter Germany, an', ef ye wuz, ye ought ter go Bolton way soon an' shop er leetle an' tell Philip."

"No, Grandma, I'm not going. Dear old Lebanon and you are good enough for me. Grandmother Filmore must think because I have some Filmore blood in me that she can map out my life to please her fancy, but I think that, although you and I are plain Lebanon Wilburs, we are equal to the great emergency of taking care of ourselves."

"Tut, tut, Lyddy, don't be independent; ye know ye air her only granddaughter an' ye mustn't speak so."

"I have not forgotten, Grandma. I have most excellent reason to remember it. You will recall how some time ago you reminded me of my Revolutionary ancestors and of my own brave father."

"Yes, Lyddy "

"Well, what is the use of having so much good fighting blood and not be able to live up to it? You see, Grandma, I understand Grandmother Filmore better than you do. Now the time has come when I am going to tell a couple of things that may open your eyes. There is a bachelor, old enough to be my father, that Grandmother has set her heart on my marrying. If I will not have Mr. McClure, her grandnephew comes next. The first has money, the second has blood. Both count for a great deal with Grandmother. She says I must form an alliance, she calls it, with one of them. When I asked her about Mr. McClure, she said he was educated and had traveled and, although a man of the world, would make an excellent husband."

"Why, Lyddy Wilbur, ye never told me uv such experiences before. No wonder yer frail."

"Grandma, I have tried not to allow these things to annoy me. You have had so much on your mind this last winter, I thought best to keep such things to myself."

"Wall, pore leetle Lyddy, er fightin' sech battles erlone. Did ye tell Philip?"

"O, no, I would not annoy him."

"Who would have ever thought yer grandmother wuz sech er schemer. I'm afeared I don't understand her. Yer grandpa, God love him, said once when I wuz paradin' her virtues, said he: 'Mother, thar's er yaller streak somewhar.' But ther thing I cain't understand is, when she is sech er religious woman, er puttin' up sech er proposition ez er worldly marriage ter er leetle innercent gal like ye. This may seem harsh, but I cain't help et."

"I feel humiliated to say it, but I believe she wor-

ships wealth, and she is determined to have me marry a rich man. Talk about the rich, the inner circle, the four hundred, why, Grandma, I saw enough and heard enough while I was in Philadelphia and New York last winter among those society people to satisfy me."

"Say, child, ez thet ther reason ye seem so changed, so womanlike? Ye hev never seemed ther same sence ye made thet last visit. Even yer grandpa noticed it an' said one time: 'Mother, our leetle Lyddy hez actually growed up. She's er woman.'"

"Yes, Grandma, last winter's visit was of such a varied experience that I hardly know how to tell you. It surely was a revelation to me."

"Why, Lyddy! What do ye mean? I never heard yer talk this way efore."

"There is nothing much I can tell you; but I would like to ask you one question."

"Very well, Lyddy."

"Grandma, did you ever have your faith shaken to the very foundation, so to speak?"

"Speak on, Lyddy. I do not ketch yer meanin'."

"I mean, did you ever lose faith in any one you considered true and good?"

"No, Lyddy, I dunno ex I ever hev unless it wuz when Deacon Franklin kicked up sech a rusty an' wuz turned out uv ther church."

"What did he do, Grandma?"

"What did he do? Well, I'll tell yer. It wuz long afore ye wuz born. Why, he jest took up with some woman down Bolton way an' left his wife, Thirza, ter shift fer herself. It wuz scandalous an' shook ther congregation, ez ye say, ter ther foundation."

"Poor wife! What did she do, Grandma?"

"Wall, Lyddy, ther wuz er court-separation an' ther deacon married ther wanton woman who caused ther split an' left ther country with her. No, Lyddy, Thirza took no back seat. She jest maintained her dignity an' went right on ez before an' retained ther respect uv ther whole country round. No, she's never married ter my knowledge."

"That was certainly a very serious offense, but what I meant was this: To see a person you considered a solid, level headed, true, concrete person, glide off into a common generality, a person you thought you could bank on, could respect even to the highest point, could even reverence. Well, that has been my experience, out in the world, and it was what changed your quiet, Lebanon girl into an experienced woman of the world."

"Speakin' of people changin' ther natur, reminds me uv er happenin' 'way back when I wuz er bride." This reminiscence caused Aunt Rhue's face to relax and a faint smile illumined it. "I will hurry through with it, Lyddy, afore we reach home. Wall, ther wuz er fam'ly lived Boston way frum my home in Worcester, friends uv our'n. Ther man wuz er lawyer, er good man an' true, not quite wise ernough ter set ther North River erfire, but jest er good, honest livin' lawyer. His wife wuz ther backbone uv ther fam'ly, though. They hed several children, more er less, an' she saved an' scrimped erlong till they wuz all raised up. Ther gals wuz ruther han'some an' good, an' ther boys wuz all right, but full uv mischief like, though they never done any special harm."

"One by one, they married off an' some uv ther gals' husbands 'struck ile,' so ter speak. One gal

hed er no count husband so she packed up an' come home ter live. They hushed ther matter right up ez proper they should an' thet put an end ter ther gossip. But thar wuz one gal ev'rybody loved, myself ermong ther rest. She wuz pure an' simple in her manner an' had er smile fer ev'rybody. Allus goin' erbout ther neighborhood doin' leetle acts uv kindness. Ef ther wuz er new baby, she wuz allus on hand with er leetle present. An' ef anybody died, she wuz on hand with er posy. She jest seemed ter fit in anywhar. Wall, she wuz ther last ter marry an' when she left home, thar wuz genuine sorrow. Her husband wuz er good man an' ev'rything he undertook prospered. An' she wuz good in many ways ter her parents, sendin' uv 'em gifts an' er letter every week. Her husband kept gettin' richer an' richer an' finally ther wuz er leetle baby girl come ter them, an' ther whole soul was centered on her fer a time; but, ez she growed an' developed so did ther fortunes, an' ther leetle one wuz left more an' more ter nurses an' hired help, ez is fashionable.

"Wall, Lyddy, ther whole upshot uv ther matter wuz she couldn't stand prosperity. Her mother died thet hed allus hed an influence over her. An' thet didn't help matters any. One by one, she dropped her old friends an' all ther time she wuz tryin' ter squeeze inter what she called aristocratic society. She wuz ambitious fer her child, she said. Wall, Lyddy, fine clo's an' diamonds an' horses an' carriages, an' servants an' above all, money, jest swep' erway all ther sweet, lovely traits uv character she hed in ther old happy days, an' jest left ther husks all dressed up fine. She sort uv ignored

all her old friends; they were no longer necessary ter her happiness. She asked no favors ner bestowed any fer she cud hev ev'rything thet money cud buy; with one stroke uv her pen, she cud cancel all obligations, she thought, fer money seemed ter be er god ter worship. Wall, child, ter speak plain, prosperity hed ruined our sweet, pure Worcester rose."

"Grandma, that is a sad story, but how true to real life. I have heard of similar ones, how women and men sell themselves for wealth and luxury. Isn't it strange that money counts for so much with some, and what is it, compared to the sweet, simple life? Oh, Grandma, how grateful I am for having been reared in this beautiful country and for the honest, moral instruction received day by day from Grandpa and you. It will ever be a beautiful thought that all I am or ever expect to be, I owe to you and Lebanon, and this sad story of the gentle, loving nature so changed by the glitter of gold will always stand out as a warning chapter in my life. It is too bad to see such noble natures warped and twisted by prosperity."

"Wall, Lyddy, did it ever occur ter ye thet sech people arter all air not as even an' well balanced ez they orter be? Thar's somethin' lackin', child, somethin' lackin'. Then jest look at people we know who hed no happy childhood ner anything ter help 'em on in life, an' how they hev developed an' growed in grace an' prosperity. I want ter tell ye, child, they cain't fit er square peg in er round hole, but ye kin whittle it till it fits. You know ther people who air cared fer an' sheltered in lovin' homes, don't know what ther pore unfortunate city-breds

air up erg'inst. Ez er general rule, it needs er few hard knocks ter round out an' develop our natures. I tell ye life ez er hard proposition when thar's no special opportunities loomin' up before us; but what I cain't understand is, why should er leetle money make sech er change in people? They can't manage ter take any uv it with 'em on the journey into thet great, mysterious unknown land beyond where neither gold ner bank-checks ner diamonds kin avail them anything; fer thar'll be no pockets in ther shrouds, child, neither will they need staff ner script."

"I think you are right, Grandma. Life is a problem and it takes long, earnest, and careful thought to work out a proper solution."

"Lyddy, did ye ever think uv how impartial God hez allus been ter mankind? Thar's no set rule ez ter how much yer goin' ter be wuth in cash value ner how much back-stock ye're wuth when ye die. No, child, thar's two things money can't buy, thet's birth an' death."

"Yes, Grandma. I fully realize what an all-wise God we have. I often wonder what we would do without His tender ministrations in time of need and a welcome approach at all times to the throne of grace, and under all circumstances whether sad or gay. I often think of the various ways in which we are brought in contact with Him. Sometimes, it is through the tiny, clinging hand, again through the love of good men and women, loving companions and tender friendships, often in the silent night watch and through the loving ministrations of dear ones. Again, his loving watchcare over us day by day, perfecting plans we know not of, revealing love

and tenderness, if we will accept it, wherever we may be."

"Yes, Lyddy, thar's the p'int—ef we will accept it."

As they drove into the yard, Jake came forward to take the horse. As Lydia threw the reins to him, she asked:

"Is everything ready to begin haying to-morrow? The men will be here on time."

"Yes, Miss Lyddy, ther scythes air all ground ter razor-sharpness an' ther grass is jest right ter mow."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The time had passed rapidly. Two successful years of teaching and two happy summers on Lebanon had caused Lydia fully to realize that at last her ship of happiness had come home to her, invoiced with the greatest love that a pure, unselfish man could bestow. The lottery of patient waiting had yielded up at last her heart's desire, and, incidentally and without design on her part, she was the winner. At last, she had entered into the sanctuary of love, the love she so much needed to round out her full life, and its closed doors would forever shut out the annoyance and doubt.

During the first year and a half, Philip had visited her often; then business of great importance took him abroad—the settlement of some rich estates. Philip hesitated, but Lydia would have him go.

Weekly letters from Philip, freighted with love and news of much interest from the old world, were greatly enjoyed, and an occasional letter from Mrs. Filmore always displayed her displeasure because Lydia would not leave Lebanon.

Late in the winter, there came from Philip a letter telling that he was in Berlin, Germany, and that this was the last city he was to visit and that soon he would sail for loved America. He also told her that he had read that morning in the Berlin daily that Mrs. Filmore was seriously ill at her hotel, as was also her companion, Miss Howland.

After this, letters came at close intervals and contained the news that he had called on Mrs. Filmore for Lydia's sake, and that she had rather coldly asked him to call again; of how Miss Howland had died, and of the arrangements he had made to have her remains sent home, the cable messages sent, and of the necessary legal proceedings in regard to her personal belongings reaching her friends; of how he had cancelled his own steamship-date in order to attend to every detail satisfactorily; of how, for days, Mrs. Filmore had been kept in ignorance of her companion's death, and of his daily visits to her; of how deep into the valley of the shadow of death she had gone; of the time spent by her bedside during the crisis; of the excellence of the German nurses; of how again he had cancelled the steamship-date, to remain at her bedside until all danger had passed; of how she clung to him in her helplessness and entreated him to stay; of her great anxiety to reach her own home once more, and of how she pleaded with him to wait and return with her; and, at last, of how she acknowledged that all her objections were

removed and that she was willing that he should marry her granddaughter.

Philip hesitated, for it meant loss of time and business to him, but Lydia entreated him to stay for her sake, and Philip had consented to remain. He arranged all Mrs. Filmore's legal matters abroad, paid all her bills, secured a competent nurse, attended to the purchase of stateroom passage with accommodations for maid, and, near-by, one for himself. Complete arrangements were made for the voyage home, even to the easiest carriage to carry them to the steamer.

Then, came the news to Lebanon flashed by cable that they were to embark the following day for home.

Mrs. Filmore was in excellent spirits in anticipation of the homeward trip. The next morning, Philip was aroused in the dull, gray dawn by the announcement that he was wanted at once at the hotel. He hurriedly slipped into his clothes and, calling a cab, stepped out into the cold, drizzling rain; after giving directions to the driver, he settled back in his seat, wondering what could be the matter.

At the hotel, he was met by Doctor Osthaus, who told him Mrs. Filmore was ill and had desired to see him at once. Philip hurried to the sick-room to be rewarded only by a smile and firm handclasp of the dying woman. He bent and kissed her forehead, but an appealing look and upturned lips caused him to kiss her again, as he whispered, "For Lydia's sake."

With a smile, the dying woman whispered: "It is well, Lydia."

Again, the steamship-tickets were cancelled; again, the cable flashed across the ocean; again, grim death had to be dealt with. As Lydia reread the last

cable in the quiet of her room, she bowed her head and murmured: "I thank thee for this great revelation of Thy love that has come into my life and leveled all barriers. I thank Thee for Philip Strong and for dear friends; also, for the little success I have attained. I now pray that the watchword, 'Love,' be substituted for ambition, forever. Sanctify this great joy of reconciliation that I have been waiting for for years. I thank Thee again that my ship is safe-freighted with love and some one to cherish and protect me forever."

As the three-thirty limited came slowly to a standstill in the train-shed at Philadelphia, a week later, a young woman, accompanied by an elderly one, stepped from the train, to be met by a distinguished-looking young man, who quickly advanced with outstretched hands.

"Oh, Philip!" exclaimed Lydia, and, as he put his arm around Aunt Rhue and drew her to his side, she whispered: "Philip, my noble boy, welcome home."

The day after the funeral, Mrs. Filmore's lawyers came to the house and, in company with Philip, who produced all the private papers given him by Mrs. Filmore, proceeded to adjust the business as best they could. The reading of the will took only a short time. Its first bequest was to the Old Quaker Church; next, substantial remembrances to all the old servants; then all the rest in sum total was bequeathed to Margaret Lydia Wilbur. A week later, the Filmore mansion was closed and put on the market for sale.

Philip remained until the last detail of Mrs. Filmore's business was carried out in full. Then, he took the train for Boston and thence on to Bolton.

Later, Lydia and Aunt Rhue, with the two old colored servants, Uncle Calib and Aunt Miranda, started on the homeward trip to Lebanon.

It was a rare day in June. Nature had been lavish in beautifying Old Lebanon. Lydia had just returned from Alden Center and carried a letter in her hand just received from Philip Armstrong.

"Dear Miss Lydia:

"The announcement of your engagement and approaching marriage received. How kind of you to remember me! It does not seem possible you are really grown up. I like best to think of you as my little child sweetheart and have often thought, if God had blessed me with a sister, I would want her just like 'Lyddy, uv Leb'non.' I want to tell you in this, which is perhaps the last letter Lydia Wilbur will receive from me, that your sweet and lovely personality as a child has often proved a benediction to me and I have loved you with a strong, brotherly love. I have, in your occasional letters during the past years, watched with pleasure and pride the marked advancement along intellectual lines, and I know that you are fully competent to cope with the world in whatever station you may be placed.

"As the brother, Philip, of whom you have written so often, takes on a nearer and dearer tie, may I not be adopted in his place? You know I am alone in the world and you are my only hope, my little mountain sweetheart that was, my precious sister to be. Give my love to dear Aunt Rhue and affectionate and hearty congratulations to yourself and Philip Strong.

"On the morrow, I sail for China, leaving the Golden Gate of the dear old United States. I will

write you when I land. Now, I close this letter with brotherly love to 'Lyddy, uv Leb'non.'

"Philip Armstrong,
"San Francisco, California."

Silently, she returned the letter to its envelope. "Brother Philip. How easy and natural to say. Yes, you shall be my brother Philip Armstrong."

A few weeks before, Lydia had given her resignation as instructor in the Seminary, in Alderson. Her work there had been pleasant and she had enjoyed it and, now, as she sat down on the steps of the piazza and looked about her, she enjoyed, as never before, her environment. As the fragrant, pungent odor of Aunt Rhue's white lilac was wafted to her she closed her eyes and murmured:

"How can I thank Thee, dear Father, for all the blessings to me. I find truly that all things are possible with Thee. I thank Thee for this letter, this new demonstration of friendship. Make me worthy to accept it in the true spirit in which it was written. Dear Father, there are many wonderful things in life but the inception and growth of this love of Philip Strong for me is the greatest; and then the reward of waiting has been more than satisfactory. All the trials and sacrifices have but tested and tried us both, and, now, to think I am free to express my love that has been so pent up, so crippled, so thwarted, that has stood with broken pinion waiting. Oh, God, I thank Thee that at last the stone has been rolled away from the sepulcher of love and that it has come forth purified and free. I thank Thee that ambition has been conquered and that I am free to take happiness by the hand, free to give Philip his just reward. O, Philip, my king!"

The sound of horses' hoofs aroused her. As she arose, a gleam of sunlight shimmered through the trees. Nature seemed to understand. Not a ripple of air stirred. Every leaf seemed at rest, so quiet was the atmosphere, and seemed in perfect harmony with the waiting heart. She looked up and saw Philip, coming toward her with outstretched hands.

"Why, Philip!"

"I could not wait for Uncle Si, dear," he exclaimed as he drew her tenderly to him. Then, looking down deep into her eyes, he saw there that the gift he had been denied so long was his at last. Slowly, they turned and walked toward the house. As they drew near the steps, the door opened and Aunt Rhue stepped out. As they came to her, she raised her hands, and they bowed and received her benediction of love.

Every one was busy. The house was strangely quiet. The tall old clock ticked off the hours to the given time when the wedding party should start. Aunt Rhue stood by her bedroom-window and murmured:

"Never again will Lydia Wilbur come home. Pore leetle gal, goin' to be married, but I'm glad uv it. She deserves ter be happy. Allus so good an' kind ter Father an' me." A tear glistened in her eyes as she drew on her gloves, but she murmured: "Thy will be done."

"Yes, yes, Lyddy, child, I'm comin'. I'm all ready. Is every door locked? Ye know ther house will be left erlone fer ther first time. Tell Josey ter put er extry knot in ther stove an' ter leave ther oven-door ajar."

As Aunt Rhue joined the family party, her face was wreathed in smiles. But as Lydia drew her grandmother's arm within her own, she caught her

eye and there saw as never before a revelation of what it must mean to her grandmother to lose her. It was a repetition of what she had seen there when she went to Philadelphia the first time, only more sad, and the remembrance of that look now rushed to her memory. Tears burned under her lashes, but her muscles grew firm as she said with a smile:

"Dear Grandma, how sweet and lovely you look," and they walked to the family-carriage in waiting.

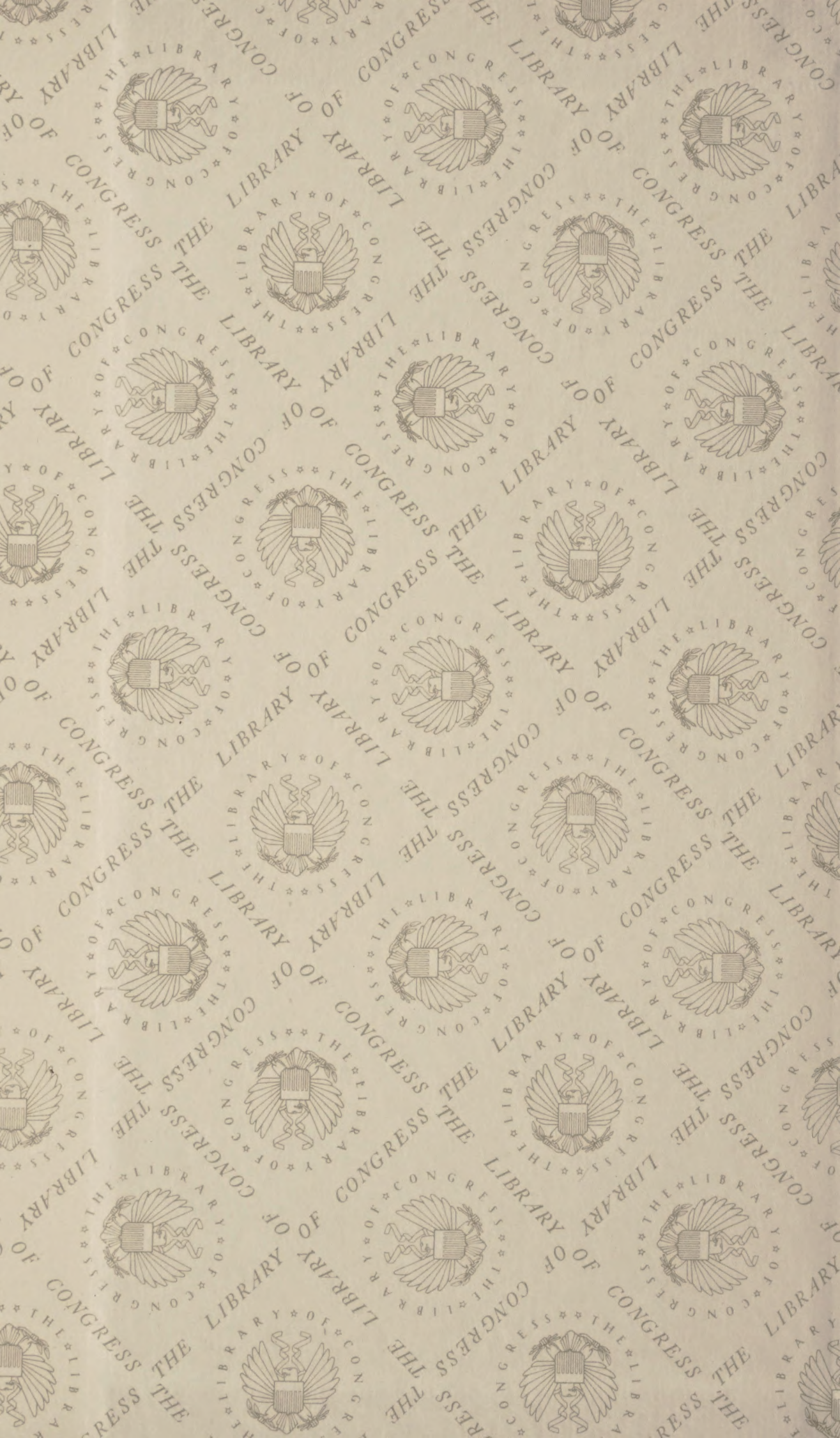
The bell rang out from the steeple of the old South Church, calling the people of all classes in Alden Center to witness the marriage of Lydia Margaret Wilbur to Philip Strong.

Aunt Rhue was again dressed in the gray silk and once more was the white crepe shawl in evidence. No prouder man ever stepped to notes of music than did Si Newman as he walked up the aisle with Lydia on his arm. They were met at the altar by Philip Strong, and the old white-haired, much-loved pastor who pronounced Philip and Lydia man and wife. As they turned to leave the church, Si was heard to remark:

"Gosh all fish-hooks, boys, but thet wuz ther hardest job ther Almighty ever laid on me. But I guess He knows His business all right, ef we hev all lost 'Lyddy, uv Leb'non.' But I reckon ye'll jest erbout find her equal in Mrs. Philip Strong."

"What use for the rope if it be not flung,
Till the swimmer's grasp to the rock has clung?
What use is eulogy's blandest breath,
When whispered in ears that are cold in death?
No! No! if you have but one word of cheer,
Speak it, while friends are alive to hear."





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